

THE POPINJAY

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O. C. Acharya

1926

ORIENTAL AGENCY
2B, Shama Charan De Street
CALCUTTA

Published by K. C. Acharya, Oriental Agency,
2B, Shama Ch. De St., Calcutta, and Printed by D. N.
Singha, Singha Printing Works, 30, Badur Bagan Street, Calcutta.

THE POPINJAY

A Romance from the French of

ALPHONSE DAUDET

*The book is Dramatised by Julia Neilson
and Fred Terry for the
New Theatre, London*

Edited by
JOHN HUNTER

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The King makes merry.

THE POPINJAY

Chapter One

THE FIRST DAY

FREDERIQUE had been sleeping since the morning—a feverish, wearied slumber, whose dreams were composed of all her distresses as an exiled and fallen queen, a slumber still shaken by the noise, the anguish of a two months' siege, filled with bloody scenes of war, with sobs, with shudders, with nerve-strains, from which she only escaped by a start of fear.

"Zara? Where is Zara?" she cried.

One of her women approached the bed, reassured her gently his Roal Highness the Count of Zara was sleeping very quietly in his room; Madame Eleonore was with him.

"And the King?"

"Gone out since noon in one of the hotel carriages."

"All by himself?"

No. His Majesty had taken Councillor Boscovich with him. As the servant went on speaking in the Dalmatian dialect, which was sonorous and harsh as a wave rolling pebbles, the Queen felt her terrors vanish; and gradually the quiet hotel room, which she had only half seen on arriving in the twilight, appeared to her in its reassuring and luxurious banality, its light hangings, its high mirrors, the woolly white of its carpets.

"Five o'clock already! Quick, Petscha, do my hair. I am ashamed to have slept so long."

It was five o'clock, and the most wonderful day which had yet cheered Parisians in the summer of 1872. When the Queen went on to the balcony—that long balcony of the Hotel des Pyramides which stretches along fifteen windows in the finest position of the Rue de Rivoli—she was amazed at the spectacle. Below, in the broad street, the sound of wheels mingled with the watering-machines as a string of carriages rolled towards the Bois, with a shining of saddlery and harness, and light dresses swept along in a gale of speed. Then, from the crowd pressing close to the gilded gate of the Tuileries, the charmed eyes of the Queen turned towards the glistening

confusion of white dresses, blond hair, garish silks, lighthearted games—towards all that impression of holiday-making and child-life which the great Parisian garden throws around its terraces on days of sunshine—and at length her eyes rested with delight on the green canopy, the huge, round, full roof of leaves reared aloft by the chestnuts in the centre, which at that moment were sheltering a military band, and were quivering with the cries of children, the sounding notes of brass. The exile's bitterness was gradually soothed by the prevailing cheerfulness. A feeling of warm ease surrounded her from every side, clinging and supple as a silken web; her cheeks, faded by vigils and privations, took on a lively pink. She thought: "Heavens! how good is this life!"

The greatest misfortunes are amenable to such sudden and unconscious relief. And it arises not from human beings, but from the multiple eloquence of things. No human formula could have brought consolation to this dispossessed queen, exiled with her husband, her child, by one of those popular movements, which remind one of earthquakes accompanied by opening abysses, thunder and lightning, and volcanic eruptions; no such consolation was possible for this woman whose brow, which was rather low and yet so proud, was still marked, as it were, by the weight of one of Europe's most splendid crowns. And behold! Nature herself joyous and renewed, appearing in that wonderful Parisian summer, which breathes the hothouse atmosphere and the languide freshness of all river country, spoke to her of hope, resurrection, appeasement. But, as she allowed her nervous strain to relax, drinking in the green horizon with her eyes, the exile suddenly shuddered. Yonder, on her left, towards the entrance of the garden, rises a ghostly monument, made of blackened walls, burnt columns, a crumbled roof, holes for windows open to the blue sky, a facade resting on perspectives of ruins, and at the end—overlooking the Seine—an almost perfect pavilion, which was touched and liked by the flames that blackened the iron of its balconies. It was all that remained of the palace of the Tuileries.

She felt deep emotion at the sight, stunned, as if she had fallen headlong on those stones. Ten years, not even ten years ago—oh! the ominous, seemingly prophetic chance that she should have come to live opposite those ruins!—she had lived there with her husband. It was in the spring of 1864. Married about three months, the Countess of Zara was then

visiting the allied courts in all her happiness as a bride and as Crown Princess. She was loved, welcomed every where. At the Tuileries especially, what balls, what *fetes* there were! Those ruined walls recalled them to her again. She saw again the immense, splendid galleries, glittering with light and jewels, the court dresses sweeping up the great stairs between a double row of glistening breastplates, and the invisible music that rose at intervals from the garden appeared to her to be Valdeufel's orchestra in the Salle des Marechaux. Had she not danced to that lively tune with their cousin Maximilian, week before his departure for Mexico? Yes; it was that very tune. A quadrille of emperors and kings, queens and empresses, whose easy motions and august faces were called up to her mind by that *motif* of the Belle Helene. Max anxious, gnawing at his fair moustache; Charlotte opposite him, near Napoleon, radiant, transfigured by the joy of being an empress. Where were the dancers of that fine quadrille to-day? All dead, exiled, or mad. Mourning upon mourning! Disaster on disaster! Was God no longer on the side of kings?

She next remembered what she had suffered since old Leopold's death had set on her brow the double crown of Illyria and Dalmatia. Her firstborn, a daughter, carried off amid the *fetes* of the coronation by one of those strange nameless diseases that indicate the exhaustion of blood and the end of a race—so that the tapers of a funeral vigil were mingled with the illuminations of the town, and on the day of burial in the cathedral there had not been time to take away the flags. Then, besides these great griefs, besides the anxiety caused her continually by her son's weak health, there were other sorrows, known to herself alone, hidden away in the most secret corner of her womanly pride. Alas! the heart of peoples is not more faithful than that of kings. One day, without any known reason Illyria, which had *feted* them so much, grew discontented with its princes. Then came misunderstandings, stubbornness, mistrust, lastly hatred—the horrible hatred of a whole country, the hatred she felt in the air, the silence of the streets, the irony of the looks, the aversion of bent heads, which made her afraid to show herself at a window, made her shrink back in her carriage during her short drives. Oh! she thought she still heard those cries of death under the terraces of her castle of Leybach as she looked at that great palace of the kings of France. She saw the last meeting of the council, the livid ministers, mad with fear, begging the King to

abdicate. Then the fight over the mountain at night—disguised as peasants—the villages in rebellion shouting, drunk with liberty like the towns—bonfires everywhere on the high ground—and the glad tears she had shed in the middle of the great disaster, on finding in a cabin some milk for her son's supper ; finally the sudden determination she had instilled into the King to throw himself into Ragusa, which was still faithful—and two months of privations and anguish endured there, the town invested, bombarded, the royal child ill, almost dying of hunger ; to crown all, the shame of surrender, the sinister embarkation in the midst of a silent, tired crowd, and the French ship carrying them off to other misfortunes, to the chill, the unknown experience of exile, while behind them the flag of the Illyrian Republic floated new and victorious over the ruined royal castle—the Tuileries reminded her of all that.

"It's fine, Paris, isn't it ?" suddenly cried a voice near her, which was joyous and young, though nasal.

The King had just appeared on the balcony holding the little prince in his arms and showing him the horizon of verdure, of roofs, and of domes, and the bustle of the streets in the beautiful light of the evening.

"Oh yes, very fine," said the child, a poor little soul, between five and six, with peaky, pronounced features, excessively fair hair, cut short, as if after an illness, who looked around him with a sweet little sickly smile, astonished at no longer hearing the siege cannons, and cheered up by the surrounding joyful^{ness}s. Exile was beginning in a happy way for him.

Nor did the King seem very gloomy ; after two hours outside on the boulevard he had come back looking bright and refreshed, which contrasted with the Queen's depression. Besides, their types were absolutely distinct ; the man thin, slender, with sallow complexion, curly black hair and a thin moustache which he was perpetually twisting with a white, too supple hand, with nice, rather nervous eyes, and something irresolute, childish in his expression which made people say, when they saw him, although he was over thirty : "How young he is." The Queen, on the contrary, a robust Dalmatian with a serious expression, with few gestures, the real male of the two, despite the transparent splendour of her complexion and her magnificent hair, which was of that Venetian blond in which the East seems to blend the wild, red tones of henna. In her presence, Christian showed the constrained,

rather embarrassed attitude of a husband who has accepted too much devotion and sacrifice. He asked gently after her health, if she had slept, how she felt after the journey. She answered with a studied softness, full of condescension, but was in reality only busied with her son, whose nose and cheeks she was feeling, and whose every movement she anxiously watched.

"He's already better than he was there," said Christian, in a low tone.

"Yes, his colour is coming back," she replied, in the same intimate tone which they only assumed when speaking of the child.

The boy smiled at both, drew their faces together in a pretty caress, as if he knew his two little arms were the only real bond between these two dissimilar beings. Below, on the pavement, some curious persons, who had heard of the prince's arrival, had stopped for a moment, with their eyes fixed on this King and Queen of Illyria, whom their heroic defence in Ragusa had rendered famous, and whose portraits had appeared on the first page of the illustrated papers. Gradually, as if they were looking at a pigeon on the eaves of a roof, or an escaped parrot, the loafers grew in numbers, their noses in the air, without knowing what it was all about. A crowd gathered in front of the hotel, and their strained looks attracted others to look towards this young couple in travelling dress with the fair-haired child lifted above them—lifted, as it were, by the hopefulness of the vanquished and the joy they felt at possessing him still alive after so fearful a tempest.

"Are you coming, Frederique?" asked the King, embarrassed by the crowd's attention.

She, however, answered, holding her head high like a queen accustomed to confront the dislike of the common herd.

"Why, it's all right here on the balcony."

"The fact is—I'd forgotten—Rosen is here with his son and daughter-in-law; he wants to see you."

At the name of Rosen, which reminded her of so many good, loyal services, the Queen's eyes brightened up.

"My brave duke! I was expecting him," she said, and as she cast a haughty look at the street before going in, a man opposite her sprang upon the stonework of the gate of the Tuileries, rising for a moment above the crowd. The same thing had happened at Leybach when their window was fired at. Frederique had a vague idea of a similar attempt, and

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drew back. A hat was raised, displaying a high forehead. The wind blew about a man's hair in the sunshine, whilst a calm, strong voice shouted : "Long live the King !" drowning the noise of the crowd. That was all she had been able to see of this unknown friend, who, in the midst of republican Paris in front of the ruined Tuileries, dared to welcome monarchs without a crown. This sympathetic salute, which she had not heard for so long, gave the Queen the impression of a hot, bright fire after a walk in freezing weather. It warmed her to the heart, and the sight of old Rosen completed this lively and beneficent reaction.

The General Duke de Rosen, formerly military head of the King's household, had left Illyria three years before, when the King took from him his post of trust and gave it to a Liberal, thus favouring the new ideas to the detriment of what was then called at Leybach the Queen's party. He might, certainly, well be angry with Christian, who had callously sacrificed him, let him go without a word of regret, without a farewell—him, the conqueror of Mostar, of Livno, the hero of the great Montenegrin wars. After selling his castles, estates, and property, and making his departure significant as a protest, the old general had settled down in Paris, had his son married there, and, during three long years of vain expectation had felt his bitterness at the royal ingratitude increased by the dreariness of emigration, the melancholy of an unoccupied life. And yet, at the first news of his prince's arrival, he hastened to them without hesitation ; and now, standing stiffly upright in the drawingroom, his colossal figure rising up to the chandelier, he was awaiting with so much emotion the favour of a gracious welcome, that his long legs could be seen trembling, his broad chest heaving under the wide ribbon of his order and the closefitting, militarily cut blue frock coat. His head alone, a small head with steely eyes and hawk nose, remained impassible, with its three white bristly hairs, and the thousand small wrinkles of his parchment skin. The King, who disliked scenes, and was rather embarrassed by the interview, got out of the difficulty by putting on an air of affability, of offhand heartiness.

"Well, general," he said, coming towards him with hands outstretched, "you were right. I let them have their head too much—they gave me a good shaking."

Then, seeing that the old retainer was bending his knee, he raised him, with a movement full of nobility, and held him

in a close embrace. Nothing, however, could have prevented the Duke from kneeling before his Queen, who was singularly moved by the old man's respectfully passionate kiss on her hand.

"Ah, my poor Rosen ! my poor Rosen !" she murmured.

And she slowly shut her eyes, that her tears might not be seen. But all those she had shed for years had left their traces on the delicate silk of her blond eyelids, together with vigils, anguish, anxiety—those tears women fancy they can hide in the deepest part of their being, and which rise to the surface, even as the least motions of water furrow it with visible folds. The beautiful face assumed for a moment a weary, sad expression, which did not escape the old soldier. "How she has suffered," he thought ; and to hide his emotion, he got up abruptly, turned to his son and daughter-in-law, who had remained at the other end of the room, and with the same fierce air with which he shouted in the streets of Leybach: "Draw sword ! Charge the rabble !" he commanded ! "Colette, Herbert, come and greet your Queen."

Prince Herbert de Rosen, almost as tall as his father, with the jaw of a horse, the innocent cheeks of a doll, approached, followed by his young wife. He walked with difficulty, leaning on a stick. Eight months before he had broken a leg, fractured a few ribs at the Chantilly races ; and the general did not fail to observe that, had it not been for this accident, which had put his son's life in peril, both would have hastened to shut themselves up in Ragusa.

"I should have gone with you, father !" interrupted the princess, in a heroic tone of voice, which contrasted with her name of Colette and her clever, merry little catlike nose under a frizzle of slender curls.

The Queen could not help smiling, and cordially gave her hand. Christian, twisting his moustache, stared with the interest of an amateur, an eager curiosity, at this dainty Parisian, this pretty, modish bird with its long, gay plumage, all skirts and frippery, whose decorated daintiness was a change from the imposing features and majestic type of his own land.

"That devil of a Herbert ! Where could he have got himself such a gem ?" he said to himself, envying his old play-fellow, that big stupid, with his protruding eyes, his hair parted and plastered down in Russian fashion on a small, excessively narrow forehead ; then it occurred to him that

though this type of woman was lacking in Illyria, in Paris it could be seen in the streets everywhere, and exile seemed to him perfectly endurable. Besides, it could not last long. The Illyrians would soon have enough of their republic. It was a matter of spending two or three months away from the country, a royal holiday, that should be spent as merrily as possible.

"Will you believe it, general?" he said, laughing, "I have already been asked to buy a house. It was an Englishman who called this morning. He promised to get me a magnificent hotel, furnished, carpeted, with horses in the stables, carriages in the coach-houses, linen, plate, crockery, servants, all in forty-eight hours, and in the part of the town I liked best."

"I know your Englishman, monseigneur, it's Tom Levis, a foreign agent."

"Yes; I think it was a name like that. Have you had any business with him?"

"Oh, all foreigners on reaching Paris receive a visit from Tom. But I hope your Majesty's acquaintance with him may stop there."

The particular attention with which Prince Herbert, as soon as Tom Levis was mentioned, began to contemplate his bootlaces, the furtive look cast by the princess at her husband, warned Christian that if he wanted information about the illustrious agent of the Rue Royale the young pair could tell him. But how could Levis be useful to him? He wanted neither house nor carriage, and thought of spending in the hotel the few months of their stay in Paris.

"Isn't that your opinion, Frederique?"

"Oh, certainly, it's wiser," answered the Queen, though at the bottom of her heart she did not share her husband's illusions, nor his taste for temporary establishments.

Old Rosen in turn hazarded a few remarks. This inn-life hardly seemed to him to suit the dignity of the house of Illyria. Paris was at that moment full of exiled sovereigns. All were living in sumptuous fashion. The King of Westphalia occupied a magnificent house in the Rue de Neubourg, with an annexe pavilion for the administrative officers. In the Champs Elysees, the *hotel* of the Queen of Galicia was a real palace of royal luxury and style. The King of Palermo had a house at Saint-Mande, numerous horses in the stables, a whole battalion of aide-de-camps. Even the Duke de Palma, in his

little house at Passy, had a semblance of a court, and always five or six generals at table.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Christian impatiently. "But it's not the same thing. Those people won't get away from Paris again. That's well known, certain, whilst we—Besides, there's a good reason why we shouldn't buy a palace, friend Rosen. We were robbed of everything. All we have left is a few hundred thousand francs at Rothschild's at Naples, and our poor daidem, which Madame de Silvis brought away in a hatbox. To think that the marquise made the long journey to exile on foot, by sea, by rail, by carriage, with her precious hatbox in her hand. It was so funny, so funny!"

And, his childishness getting the upper hand, he began laughing at their distressed position as if it were the most amusing thing in the world.

The Duke did not laugh.

"Sire," said he, so moved that all his old wrinkles trembled, "you just now did me the honour to assure me that you were sorry to have left me so long apart from your councils and your heart. Well, I ask of you a favour in return. So long as your exile lasts, restore me to the post I filled at Leybach near your Majesties—head of the civil and military household."

"What an ambitious fellow!" cried the King gaily.

Then, in a friendly way:

"But the household no longer exists, my poor general, either civil or military. The Queen has her chaplain and two women; Zara, his governess; I have brought Boscovich for the correspondence, and Lebeau to have my chin. And that's all."

"In that case, I am still going to beg. Will your Majesty take my son Herbert as aide-de-camp, and give the Queen the princess as reader and lady-in-waiting?"

"For my part it is granted, duke," said the Queen, turning her charming smile to Colette, who was quite dazed by her new dignity.

As for the prince, he thanked his sovereign for conferring on him the rank of aide de camp with the same graciousness, by a graceful neigh, a habit he had acquired through frequenting Tattersall's.

"I shall present the three nominations tomorrow morning for signature," added the general, in a respectful but brief tone, indicating that he considered himself as having already entered on his duties.

On hearing that voice, that formula which had haunted him so long and so solemnly, the young King's face expressed depression and boredom, then he comforted himself by looking at the princess, who was embellished, transfigured by happiness, as happens to pretty, featureless faces, whose charm lies entirely in the piquant and constantly lifted veil of their physiognomy.

Fancy! Colette Sauvadon, niece of Sauvadon, the big wine merchant at Bercy, lady-in waiting to Queen Frederique! What will the Rue de Varennes, the Rue Saint-Dominique say, in those exclusive *salons* to which her marriage with Herbert had only admitted her at grand receptions, but never in intimacy! Her little worldly fancy was already travelling in an imaginary court. She thought of the visiting cards she would have made, all the new toilettes, a dress in Illyrian colours, with rosettes to match for her horses' heads. But the King was speaking near her.

"This is our first meal in the land of exile," he said, in a half-serious tone, designedly emphatic. "I wish the table to be gay and surrounded by all our friends."

And, seeing the frightened look of the general at this sudden invitation:

"Ah! yes, it's true, etiquette, form—goodness! we have got rid of all that since the siege, and the head of our household will find many reforms to make. Only I beg that they shall not begin till to-morrow."

At that moment the *maitre d'hotel* announced their Majesties' dinner. The princess was already rising, full of pride, to take Christian's arm; but he went and offered it to the Queen, and, without troubling about the others, broke into the dining-room. All the ceremonial of the court had not remained, whatever he said, at the bottom of the Ragusa casemates.

The transition from sunlight to artificial light struck the guests as they entered. Despite the lustre, the candelabra, two large lamps placed on the sideboards, it was difficult to see, as if day light, brutally shut out before its time, had left a dubious twilight on things. What added to this gloomy appearance was the length and disproportion of the table with the small number of guests, a table that had been sought for all over the hotel, to suit the demands of etiquette, at which the King and Queen sat together at one of the ends without anybody at their sides or opposite. This filled the little

Princess de Rosen with astonishment and admiration. In the last days of the Empire, when admitted to a dinner at the Tuileries, she well remembered seeing the Emperor and Empress sitting opposite one another, *bourgeois* fashion, like any ordinary married folk, at their wedding breakfast. "Ah! there you are!" she said to herself, closing her fan with a decisive gesture and laying it near her, beside her gloves. "Legitimacy! that's the thing!"

The thought changed in her eyes this species of ill-assorted *table d'hôte*, the sight of which recalled the splendid inns of the Italian Corniche, between Monaco and San Remo, at the beginning of the season, when the troops of tourists have not yet arrived. The same medley of people and toilettes—Christian in a shooting-jacket, the Queen in her travelling dress, Herbert and his wife in boulevard costumes, the Franciscan robe of Father Aloheo, the Queen's chaplain, rubbing against the general's semi-uniform. Nothing, in fact, could be less imposing. There was only grandeur in one thing, the chaplain's prayer, invoking a heavenly blessing on the first meal in exile.

"*Quae sumus sumpturi prima die in exilio,*" said the monk, with hands outstretched; and those slowly-recited words seemed to prolong to a far distant date King Christian's brief holiday.

"Amen!" replied the dethroned monarch in a grave voice, as if, in the Latin of the Church, he had at last felt the thousand broken bonds, still alive and quivering, which the banished of every age draw after them, like uprooted trees their living roots.

But the strongest impressions did not hold long with this caressing and polite Slavic nature. He had hardly sat down when he resumed his gaiety, his absent air, and began talking a great deal, setting out, from regard for the Parisian lady, to speak French very correctly, but with a slight Italian lisp, that suited his laugh well. He related various incidents of the siege in a comically heroic tone; the establishment of the court in the casemates, the strange appearances of the governess, Marquise Eleonore de Silvis, with her green-feathered toque and her plaid. That innocent lady was happily dining in her pupil's room and did not hear the laughter raised by the King's jests. Then Roscovich and his herbarium served him as a butt. He seemed to wish to revenge himself for the seriousness of circumstances by means of boyish tomfoolery

The Aulic Councillor Boscovich, a small man, of no particular age, timorous and gentle, with rabbit's eyes, that always looked sideways, was a learned jurisconsult, very passionate about botany. At Ragusa, the law courts being closed, he spent his time in botanising, under bomb fire, in the ditches of the fortifications; the quite unconscious heroism of a mind quite absorbed in its mania, which, amid the huge calamities of his country, was solely preoccupied about a magnificent herbarium that had remained in the hands of the Liberals.

"You may fancy, my poor Boscovich," said Christian, to frighten him, "what a fine bonfire they must have made of those heaps of dried flowers—unless the Republic, being very poor, should have decided to cut new capes for its militia out of your large sheets of grey blotting-paper."

The councillor laughed with the rest, but with frightened looks, with the words, "*Ma che—ma che*," which betrayed his childish fears.

"How charming the King is! What wit! and what eyes!" thought the little princess, towards whom Christian kept bending every instant, as if to diminish the distance which ceremony placed between them.

It was a pleasure to see her expand under the evident complaisance of his august look, play with her fan, with little cries throw back her supple figure, on which her laughter palpitated in sounding and visible waves. The Queen, by her attitude, the intimate conversation with her neighbour, the old duke, seemed to isolate herself from this overflowing merriment. Once or twice, when the siege was talked of, she said a few words, and each time to display the King's bravery, his strategical knowledge, then she resumed her aloofness. In a low voice the general asked after the persons of the court, his old companions who, more lucky than himself, had followed their princes to Ragusa. Many had remained there, and, as Rosen mentioned each name, one heard the Queen answering in her serious voice: "Dead! Dead!"—a funeral note, sounding the knell of these so recent losses. Nevertheless, after dinner, when they had returned to the drawing-room, Frederique brightened up a bit; she bade Colette de Rosen sit beside her on a sofa, and talked to her with that affectionate familiarity she used to attract sympathisers, which resembled the pressure of her beautiful hand, with its slender fingers but strong palm, communicating to you its beneficent energy. Then suddenly:

"Come and see Zara go to bed, princess."

At the end of a long corridor, encumbered, like the rest of the apartment, with piled-up boxes, open trunks overflowing with linen and things, in the great disorder of arrival, was the room of the little prince, lighted by a shaded lamp, which lit up the bluish bed curtains.

A servant was sleeping, seated on a trunk, her head wrapped in a white coif and the pinkbordered handkerchief that completes the headgear of Dalmatian woman.

Near the table the governess, resting lightly on her elbow, an open book on her knees, was also suffering from the soporific influence of her reading, and retained, even in sleep, the romantic and sentimental air which the King mocked at so much. The Queen's entry did not awake her; but the little prince, at the first movement of the mosquito net which covered his bed, stretched out his hands and tried to sit up, with wide-open eyes and empty gaze. For some months he had been so used to being awakened at night, hurriedly dressed for flight or departure, to seeing around him, on awakening, new places and new faces, that his sleep had lost its healthy continuity, and was no longer that ten hour's journey to the land of dreams which children accomplish with the continuous, regular, almost imperceptible breathing of their little half-open mouths.

"Good-night, mamma," he murmured, "have we got to be off again?"

One felt, in this resigned and touching exclamation, how much the child had suffered, and how much too much it had been for him.

"No, no, my darling, we are safe now. Go to sleep. You must go to sleep."

"Oh! all right then. I shall go back to the glass mountain with the giant Robistor. I felt so happy."

"Madame Eleonore's stories disturb his brain," said the Queen softly. "Poor little fellow! Life is so black for him. Only stories amuse him. Still, we must make up our minds to put something else in his head."

Whilst speaking, she shook up the child's pillow put him to rest with caressing gestures, just like any simple *bourgeoise* which upset all Collette de Rosen's grandiose ideas about royalty. Then, when she bent to kiss her son, he asked her in the ear if it was cannon or the sea he heard rumbling in the distance. The Queen listened a moment to the confused,

unceasing rumbling which at times made the walls crack and the glass tremble, enveloped the house from top to bottom, died away and began again, suddenly increased and merged in other noises.

"It's nothing. It's Paris, my son. Go to sleep."

And the child, fallen from the throne, who had heard of Paris as of a refuge, went to sleep again trustfully, lulled by the town of revolutions.

When the Queen and princess returned to the drawing-room they found a young, very distinguished woman standing and talking with the King. The familiar tone of the conversation, the respectful distance of the rest of the company, showed she was a personage of importance. The Queen uttered a cry of emotion.

"Maria !"

"Frederique !"

and the same impulse of tenderness threw them into each other's open arms. Herbert de Rosen, mutely interrogated by his wife, named the visitor. It was the Queen of Palermo. Rather taller and thinner than her cousin of Illyria, she seemed a few years older. Her black eyes, her black hair, brushed back of her brow, her pale complexion, gave her the look of an Italian, though she was born at the court of Bavaria. There was nothing German in her but the stiffness of her long, flat figure, the haughty expression of her smile and something dowdy, inharmonious, in her dress, which distinguishes woman from beyond the Rhine. Frederique, who was an orphan at early age, had been brought up at Munich with her cousin; and, though separated by their lives, they had kept a lively affection for each other.

"You see, I couldn't wait," said the Queen of Palermo, holding her hands. "Cecco did not return. I've come without him. he was too long about it! I've thought so often of you—of you two! Oh! those cannons—Ragusa. I fancied I heard them at night from Vincennes.

"It was only the echo of those of Caserta," broke in Christian, alluding to the heroic attitude of this Queen a few years before, exiled and deposed like themselves.

See sighed.

"Ah, yes, Caserta; we too were left all alone. What a pity! As if all crowns ought not to be interdependent. But now it's all over. The world is mad."

Then turning to Christian :

"Still, my compliments, cousin—you fell like a king "

"Oh !" said he, pointing to Frederique, "the true king of us two——"

A gesture of his wife stopped his mouth. He bowed, smiled, turned on his heel.

"Come and smoke, Herbert !" he said to his aide-de-camp.

And they went out on the balcony.

The evening was warm and splendid, the light was scarcely extinguished in the brilliance of the gas-lamps, where it died in blue gleams. The dark mass of the Tuileries chestnuts maintained a fanlike breeze around them, and in the heaven above quickened the brightness of the stars. With this background of freshness, this space for the noises of the crowd, the Rue de Rivoli lost the stifling look of Paris streets in summer ; but still one felt the tremendous movement of the town people towards the Champs Elysees, their open-air concerts under the flaring gas-lights. Pleasure, which winter shuts behind the warm hangings of closed windows, was singing freely, laughing, amusing itself in flowery hats in floating mantillas, in muslin dresses, with white necks clasped in black ribbons, illuminated by a chance street lamp. The cafes, the ice-cream shops, overflowed on the pavements with sounds of money, calls, clinkings of glasses.

"This Paris is extraordinary," said Christian of Illyria, puffing smoke before him into the shade. "The air is different from what it is elsewhere ; there is something heady, intoxicating, when I think that at Leybach at this hour everything is closed, asleep, extinguished."

Then, in a joyous tone :

"Well, my aide-de camp, I hope I'll be initiated into the Parisian pleasures. You seem to me *au courant*, altogether in the know."

"Yes, monseigneur," said Herbert, neighing with gratified pride. "At the club, at the opera—everywhere—they call me 'the King of Toffs.' "

And whilst Christian made him explain the meaning of this new word, the two queens, who had gone to Frederique's room to talk more freely, were conversing at length in sad confidences, the whispering of which could be heard behind the half-closed shutter. In the drawing room Father Alpheo and the old duke were also talking in a low voice.

"He's quite right," said the chaplain, "she's the king—the real king. If you had seen her on horseback, going round

the outposts day and night ! At Fort Saint-Ange, when it was raining iron, in order to encourage the soldiers, she went twice round the top of the trenches, erect and proud, her riding habit on her arm and her whip in her hand, as if in the palace park. You should have seen our sailors, when she came down. He, meanwhile, was fooling about heaven knows where ! Brave ?—yes ! as brave as she is ; but no go, no faith. And in order to win heaven, even as to save one's crown, Monsieur le Duc, one must have faith !”

The monk was getting excited, swelling in his long robe, and Rosen had to calm him.

“Gently, Father Alpee—Father Alpee, come, come,” for he was afraid of Collette hearing them.

She had been left to Councillor Boscovich, who was talking to her about his plants, mixing scientific terms with the minute details of his botanical excursions. His conversation smelt of faded herbs and the disturbed dust of an old country library. Well, there is so powerful an attraction in greatness, the atmosphere it exhales intoxicates so strongly and so delightfully certain small natures that are eager to breathe it, that the young princess, this Princess Colette of society balls, races, and first nights, ever in the van of the Paris that amuses itself, smiled her prettiest whilst listening to the councillor's dry words. It sufficed her to know that the King was talking at the window, that two queens were exchanging confidences in the next room, for the banal hotel drawing-room, in which her elegance appeared quite out of place, to put on the grandeur, the sad majesty which makes so melancholy the vast halls of Versailles, with their waxened parquets glistening like their mirrors. She could have remained there in ecstasy till midnight, without moving, without being bored, hut a trifle inquisitive about the long talk between Christian and her husband. What grave questions were they discussing ? What vast projects for the restoration of the monarchy ? Her curiosity redoubled when she saw them both appear again, their faces livened up, their eyes decided and bright.

“I'm going out with monseigneur,” Herbert told her in a low voice ; “my father will bring you home.”

The King approached in turn.

“You mustn't be too angry with me, princess. His duties are beginning.”

“Every instant of our lives belongs to your Majesties,” answered the young woman, convinced that it was a question

of some important and mysterious measure, perhaps a first rendezvous of conspirators. Oh ! if she could only join them !

Christian had gone towards the Queen's room, but stopped near the door.

"She is crying," he said to Herbert, turning back. "Good-night, I sha'n't go in."

In the street his joy, relief, burst out. He passed his arm under his aide-de-camp's, after lighting a fresh cigar in the hotel hall.

"How good it feels to go out along to the crowd, to walk among them, to be master of one's words, one's gestures, and when a pretty girl passes, to be able to turn one's head without embroiling Europe through it. It's the advantage of exile. When I came eight years ago, I only saw Paris from the windows of the Tuileries, from the top of the gala coaches. This time I want to know everything, to go everywhere. *Sapristi !* now I come to think, I'm making you walk, walk, and you are lame, my poor Herbert. Wait, we'll call a cab.

The prince tried to protest. His leg did not hurt him at all. He felt strong enough to go as far as that. But Christian insisted.

"No, no, I don't want my guide knocked up the first night."

He hailed a passing vehicle which was going towards the Place de la Concorde with a clank of strained springs and whip-crackings on the animal's bony spine, jumped in lightly, setteled down, rubbing his hands with childlike joy, on the old blue cloth cushions.

"Where are we going, my prince ?" said the cabman, without suspecting he had spoken so correctly.

And Christian of Illyria replied, in the triumphant voice of a schoolboy out for a holiday :

"To Mabille !"

Chapter Two

A ROYALIST

THEIR heads close-shaven and bare under a sharp December drizzle that rimmed the brown wool of their frocks with needle-points, two monks, wearing the girdle and round cowl of the Franciscan order, strode quickly down the incline of the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince.

At this early hour young woman in wrappers and slippers, their eyes swollen from sleeplessness, their hair rolled up in a net, were crossing the street to get milk for breakfast from the dairy, some laughing and running in the street, others, on the other hand, very dignified, balancing their pewter pot, and dragging along their shoes, their faded finery, with the majestic indifference of fairy queens; and as, in spite of ulsters and morocco portfolios, hearts twenty years old always follow their age, the students would smile at the fair. "Hullo, Lea," "Good-day, Clemence," they called from one pavement to the other. Appointments were made for the evening: "At the Medicis," or "At the Louis XII.;" and suddenly, at a remark which was too strong, or misunderstood, one of the girls would break out in stupefying wrath in the invariable formula: "Go along with you, you insolent fellow!" Think how the two monks must have shuddered at the contact of all these young people, turning round and laughing as they passed, but laughing discomfitedly, for one of the Franciscans, thin, black and dry as a bean, had a terrible pirate face beneath his shaggy eyebrows, and his cassock, tightened round him by his girdle in big, rough folds, revealed the loins and muscles of an athlete. Neither he nor his companion appeared to notice the street, whose atmosphere they shook with their strides; their eyes were fixed, they were absorbed, striving solely to get to the end of their journey. Before reaching the broad staircase descending to the School of Medicine, the elder signalled to the other.

"It's here."

It was a furnished lodging house of poor appearance in an alley, fronted with a green gate with a bell, situated between a newspaper shop and a beershop, bearing on its signboard: "Brasserie du Rialto," doubtless because the writing was done by young ladies in Venetian coiffures.

"Has M. Elysee gone out?" asked one of the fathers as they passed the office on the first storey.

A fat woman, who must have lived in many lodging houses before having one on her own account, replied lazily from her chair, without even consulting the rows of keys:

"Gone out, at this hour? You had better ask if he has come home!"

Then a glance at the cassocks made her change her tone, and she pointed out, with much fussiness, the room of Elysee Meraut:

"No. 36, fifth floor, end of the corridor."

The Franciscans went up, wandered among narrow passages encumbered with dirty boots and high-heeled shoes, grey, bronze, fantastic, luxurious or pitiable, that told long tales about the lodger's life; but they paid no attention, swept by them in passing, with their rough skirts and the cross of their big rosaries, and hardly moved when handsome young girl, dressed in a red skirt, with her bare chest and arms in a man's overcoat crossed the landing on the third floor, leant over the banisters to call out something to the waiter, with a harsh voice and laugh in a singularly coarse mouth. However, they exchanged a significant look.

"If he is the man you say," murmured the pirate, with a foreign accent, "he has selected a strange *milieu*."

The other, the elder man, with a clever, intelligent face, smiled with priestly malice and indulgence.

"Saint Paul among the Gentiles!" he murmured.

Reaching the fifth floor, the monks again hesitated a moment, the low ceiling of the sombre staircase hardly allowing the numbers to be distinguished, and several doors being adorned with cards, such as "Mlle. Alice, without any other indication of profession, an indication that would indeed have been quite useless, as there were several competitors in the same business in the house; and imagine the worthy fathers going and knocking by mistake at one of their doors!

"We must call to him, *parbleu*!" said the black-browed monk, who made the hotel resound with a military emphasised "Monsieur Meraut!"

Not less vigorous, not less vibrating than his shout was the answer that came from the room at the end of the corridor. And when they had opened the door, the voice went in joyfully:

So it's you, Father Melchior? No luck! I thought it was a registered letter coming. Come in all the same, reverend friends, and make yourselves at home. Sit down if you can."

There were, indeed, on all the furniture books, newspapers, reviews, covering and concealing the sordid conventionality of an eighteenth-rate lodging, the discoloured tiles, the broken-sofa, the everlasting Empire writing-desk, and the three worn-out velvet chairs. On the bed printed papers were mixed up with clothes and the thin brown blanket, bundles of proofs which the master of the rooms, still in bed, sabred with big marks in coloured pencil. This wretched working interior, the fireless chimney, the dusty nakedness of the walls, were illumined by the light of neighbouring roofs, the re-

fraction of a rainy sky on wet slates, and Meraut's big forehead, his bilious, powerful face, received from it the intelligent melancholy brightness which distinguishes certain faces that only met with in Paris.

"Still my hovel, you see, Father Melchior ! Well, I alighted here on my arrival eighteen years ago. I haven't moved since. So many dreams, hopes buried in every corner—ideas that I rediscover under ancient dust. I'm sure that if I leave this poor room I should leave the best of myself behind. It's so true that kept the room when I went away—"

"To be sure, yes, your journey ?" said Father Melchior with a little wink at his companion.

I thought you had gone away for long. What happened ? Didn't the place suit you ?"

"Oh ! so far as concerns the place," answered Meraut, shaking his mane, "it could be finer. The pay of a minister plenipotentiary, lodged in the palace, horses, carriages, servants. Everyone charming to me, the Emperor, the Empress, the Archdukes. Spite of it all, I was bored. I wanted Paris, especially the Quartier Latin, the air we breathe here, light, vibrant and young, the Odeon galleries, the new book looked at standing with two fingers—or the hunt for old books ; those books heaped up on the parapets of the quays, like a rampart sheltering studious Paris from the futility and egoism of the rest of it. And then that's not all"—here his voice grew more serious—"you know my ideas, Father Melchior. You know what was my ambition in accepting that subaltern position. I wanted to make a king of that little man, a really kingly king, such as we never see now ; to raise him, mould him, cut him for the great role which overpowers, crushes them all, like the mediæval armour that remains in the old armouries to shame our degenerate shoulders and chests. Ah, well ! What I found at the court of X—were Liberals, my friend—reformers, men of progress and new ideas—dreadful plebeians, who don't understand that if monarchy is condemned it had better die fighting, wrapped in its flag, than end in a dotard's arm-chair propelled by some parliament. With my first lesson, there was an outcry in the palace : Where does he come from ? What does this savage intend to do to us ? Then I was begged with all kinds of soft sawder to stick to simple tutorial questions. When I heard that, I took my hat, and good-bye to their Majesties !"

He spoke in a strong, full voice, with a metallic southern

accent; and as he spoke he looked transfigured. His head was large and ugly, with a big forehead overshadowed by a mass of black hair variegated with a white tuft, a thick, broken nose, a strong mouth without any beard that might have hidden it, for his skin had the wrinkles, cracks, hardness, of hot volcanic earth; yet all this was wonderfully illumined by passion.

"So you are disgusted at great people?" went on the old monk, whose insinuating, muffled voice formed so great a contrast to that explosion of eloquence.

"Surely!" replied the other energetically.

"Still, all kings are not alike. I know one to whom your ideas——"

"No, no, Father Melchior. I've done with that. I don't want to try again. If I saw monarchy near, I should be too afraid of losing my loyalism."

After a silence the artful priest took a round about way to carry back his thoughts by a different door.

"Did this absence of six months do you harm, Meraut?"

"No, not much. To begin with, the uncle Sauvadon has remained true to me—you know Sauvadon, my Bercy millionaire. As he meets a number of people at his niece's, the Princess de Rosen, and wants to be able to share in the talk, he has engaged me to give him three times a week what he calls 'ideas about things.' The dear man is charming in his simplicity, his confidence. 'Monsieur Meraut, what ought I to think about this book?' 'Execrable', 'Still, I thought... I heard the other night at the Princess's——' 'If you have an opinion, my presence here is useless.' 'No, no, my dear friend, you know well I have no opinion.' The fact is, he is absolutely without one, and accepts blindfold everything I say. I am his thinking material. When I went away, he spoke no more for want of ideas. And when I returned, you should have seen him throw himself on me! I have also two Wallachians to whom I give lessons in political law. Then some little jobs. I'm finishing at this moment a 'Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa,' after authentic documents. There is not much of my writing in it, except a final chapter, with which I'm rather pleased. I've got the proofs here. Would you like me to read it? I call it 'Europe without Kings'!"

Whilst he read his Royalist pronouncement, stirring himself to tears, the awakening of the lodging house surrounded them with the laughter of youth, gaiety blended with the clinking of

plates and glasses, with the broken, wooden notes of an old piano—an astonishing contrast which the Franciscans hardly noticed, absorbed in the delight of hearing his powerful and brutal defence of royalty ; the fall one, especially, quivering, stamping, restraining cries of enthusiasm, with an energetic gesture that threatened to crush his chest with his folded arms. The reading finished, he got up, strode about, overflowing with gestures, with words.

"Yes, that's good ; that's true ; the divine legitimate, absolute right. No more parliaments ; no more pleaders ; to the devil with the whole lot," and his glance burnt and blazed like a faggot of the Holy Brotherhood. Father Melchior, who was more calm, congratulated Meraut on his book.

"I hope you will sign it."

"No more than the others. You well know, Father Melchior, that my sole ambition is for my ideas. The book will be well paid. Uncle Sauvadon got me this windfall, but I would have written it for nothing quite willingly. It's so fine to record the annals of that royalty in its agony, to listen to the failing breath of the old world, dying with out-worn monarchies ; there, at least, is a fallen king, who has given them all a proud lesson—a hero that Christian—there is among those daily notes the account of a walk he took beneath the bombs at Fort Saint-Ange. Marvellous !"

One of the fathers bowed his head. He knew better than anybody the truth about that heroic display and that still heroic lie ; but a will higher than his had ordered discretion. He contented himself with making a sign to his companion, who rose, and suddenly said to Meraut :

"Well, it's for that hero's son that I've come here—with Father Alpee, almoner of the court of Illyria. Will you undertake the instruction of the royal child ?"

"You won't have a palace or grand coaches with us," continued Father Alpee sadly, "nor the Imperial generosity of the court of X—. You will serve deposed princes around whom an exile that has already lasted more than a year, and threatens to last longer, has thrown gloom and solitude—your ideas are ours—the King has certainly had some itch towards Liberalism, but he has recognised its nullity since its fall. The Queen—the Queen is sublime—you will see her."

"When ?" asked the visionary, suddenly enthralled again by his chimera of making a King by his genius, just as a writer composes his work.

And an early meeting was agreed upon on the spot.

Elysee Meraut was the son of a Languedoc weaver, whose father, grown ambitious for him, had sent him to the Papel school, which was kept by one of those Spanish refugees who filled the southern towns of France after the capitulation of Marotto. It was in the quarter of the Boucheries, in a tumble-down, mouldy house, in the shadow of the cathedral, as was shown by its small mildewed windows, and the crevices of its walls. Little Papel had a huge, greasy face, shaded by a white cap pressed down on his eyes to hide a big, swollen blue vein, which divided his forehead from his eyebrows at the beginning of the hair, and resembled one of Velasquez's dwarfs. Brutal, too, and cruel, still he kept in his big skull a prodigious store of ideas, a living and luminous encyclopædia, shut in, as it were, by an obstinate Royalism, like a bar on his forehead, which was symbolised by the abnormal swelling of the strange bloodvessel.

It was bruited about in the town that the name of Papel concealed another, and more famous one, that of a follower of Don Carlos celebrated for his ferocious way of waging war and varying death. Being so near the Spanish frontier, his shameful glory embarrassed him, and obliged him to live anonymously. What truth was there in the story? During the many years he was with his master Elysee, although he was M. Papel's favourite pupil, never heard the terrible dwarf say a word, never saw him receive a visit or a letter that could confirm his suspicions. Only, when the child became a man, when he had finished his studies, and the question arose of sending him to Paris, M. Papel gave him several letters of introduction to the chiefs of the Legitimist party—heavy letters, sealed with mysterious coats of arms—which seemed to confirm the legend of the disguised Carlist.

At twenty Elysee Meraut reached Paris, boiling over with exalted convictions, in which the blind, Royalist devotion of his father was fortified by the Spaniard's militant fanaticism. He was received by the party like a traveller getting into a first-class carriage at night, when everyone had settled down in his corner to sleep. This black-eyed enthusiast, with his thin, leonine head, accentuating every syllable, every period, by forcible gestures, possessing in himself, in all readiness, the dash of a Suleau, the daring of a Cadoudal, caused astonishment, mingled with fright, in the party. He was thought dangerous, disquieting. He soon discovered that he was too

young, too active for these ghosts of old France. Moreover, the Imperial Epopee was then in full swing, and the army, returning from battles in Italy, were flying their victorious eagles in the boulevards. Still, his royalism was not quenched, but it broadened in thought, since action was no longer possible. He dreamt of writing a book about it, to set down his convictions, his beliefs, which he wanted to utter and to spread in the great Paris he hoped to convince. His plan was at once drawn up: he would make a living by giving lessons, and they were soon found; he would write his book in the intervals, which required much more time. Soon after he had been offered and accepted the post of tutor at the court of X—.

Chapter Three

THE COURT AT SAINT-MANDE

THE temporary establishment at the Hotel des Pyramides had lasted three months—six months—with the almost unpacked trunks, the half-unstrapped bags, the disorder and uncertainty of an encampment. Every day excellent news arrived from Illyria. On a new soil, without routes, where it had neither past nor hero, the Republic was not getting on. The people were tired of it, regretted their princes, and calculations of infallible certainty declared to the exiles: "Hold yourselves ready—to-morrow's the day." Not a nail was fixed in the rooms, not a piece of furniture was moved, without the hopeful cry: "It's not worth while." However, the exile continued, and the Queen soon understood that this staying in a hotel, amid a whirlwind of strangers, a flight of birds of passage of every feather, would be contrary to the dignity of their rank. Tent was struck, a house was bought, they settled down. From a nomad the exile grew into a settler.

It was at Saint-Mande, in the Avenue Daumesnil, at the top of the Rue Herbillon, in that part which skirts the wood, bordered by elegant buildings, pretty gates, affording views of sanded gardens, of rounded flights of steps, lawns that lend the illusion of a corner of the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne. In one of these *hotels* the King and Queen of Palermo, who had no great fortune, had already taken refuge, fleeing the excitements and luxurious quarters of society. The Duchess

Malines, the Queen of Palermo's sister, had come to join her at Saint-Mande, and the two easily attracted their cousin to that quarter. Apart from questions of friendship, Frederique desired to be away from the merry-making of Paris, to protest against modern society and the prosperity of the Republic, to avoid that curiosity which attaches to well-known people, and which seemed to her an insult to their calamity. The King had at first exclaimed against the remoteness of the house, but he soon made it a pretext for long absences and later returns. Finally, to crown all, living was less dear there than anywhere else, and they could be equally comfortable at small expense.

The white house, three storeys high, flanked by two turrets, overlooked the wood across the trees of its little park, whilst towards the Rue Herbillon, between the offices and the conservatories facing each other, was a large round courtyard, gravelled to the doorsteps, which was surmounted by a marquee, supported, like a tent, by two long inclined lances. Ten horses in the stables; carriage horses, riding horses—the Queen rode every day—the liveries in Illyrian colours, wigged and powdered, with a hall porter whose halberd and golden shoulder-belt were as legendary at Saint-Amande and at Vincennes as the wooden leg of old Daumesnil; all this gave an air of suitable and almost fresh luxury. It was, indeed, scarcely more than a year since Tom Levis had improvised with all its scenery and accessories, the princely stage on which is to be played the historic drama we are relating. Yes, Tom Levis—in spite of misgivings, of repugnance, they had to go to him.

Although their life was restricted, however, it occurred to Christian, more experienced than Frederique, to be astonished at their relative comfort.

"This Rosen is wonderful. I really don't know how he contrives to manage with the little we have."

Then he added, laughing:

"Anyhow, we may be sure that he does not pay out any of his own money."

The fact is, that in Illyria Rosen was synonymous with Harpagon. Even in Paris the reputation for stinginess had followed the duke, and was confirmed by his son's marriage, which was arranged by a special agency, and which all the charm of the little Sauvadon could not hinder from being a sordid *mesalliance*. Still, Rosen was rich. The old Pandour who carried all his rapacious and predatory instincts written

in his bird of prey profile, had not made war with the Turks and Montenegrins only for glory. With each campaign his waggons returned full, and the magnificent *hotel* he occupied at the end of the Ile-Saint-Louis, close to the Hotel Lambert, was choke-full with precious things, Oriental tapestry, mediæval furniture, triptychs of massive gold, reliquaries, embroidered stuffs, the booty of convents or harems, heaped up in a suite of reception-rooms, opened only once for the marriage of Herbert, and the fairy *fete* paid for by Uncle Sauvadon.

The arrival of his sovereigns, the nomination of all the Rosens to posts in the small court, had slightly changed the old duke's habits. Firstly, the young people had come to live with him, their establishment in the Parc Monceaux, a regular modern cage with gilt bars, being too far from Vincennes. Every morning at nine, in all weathers, Princess Colette was ready for the rising of the Queen, and got into the carriage with the general, in that river fog which on winter and summer mornings lasts till midday at the point of the island, like a veil on the magic scenery of the Seine. At this hour Prince Herbert tried to win back a little of the sleep lost in arduous night duty, since King Christian had ten years of provincial life and conjugal curfew to make up for, and was so reluctant to leave nocturnal Paris that, after the closing of the theatres and the cafes, he found it delightful, on leaving his club, to roam about the deserted boulevards, dry and echoing, or glistening with water, along the line of the gas-lamps.

On reaching Saint-Mande, Colette went up to the Queen. The duke established himself in a pavilion within reach of the servants and tradespeople. His avarice was such that, although not paying on his own account, each time he had to give out money his face would contract with a nervous movement of his wrinkles, as if they had been pulled with the string of a bag. In spite of everything, he contrived to be always ready, and to provide, with the modest resources of the Prince of Illyria, for the waste inevitable in a big house, for the Queen's charities, the King's bounties, even for his pleasures, which were an item in the Budget, for Christian II. had kept word with himself and was spending his time of exile joyously. He led the idle, full life of the gilded youth. In the afternoon he was at tennis or skating, then the Bois, a visit towards evening to a certain *chic* boudoir, whose luxuriousness and excessive freedom of speech suited him; in the evening the small theatres, the green room, the club, and especially gambling. He hardly

ever went out with the Queen, except on Sundays, to take her to the Church of Saint-Amande, and, except at meals, scarcely saw her. He was afraid of her reasonable, straight character, always occupied with duty, whose contemptuous coldness worried him like a visible conscience. It was a recall to his responsibilities as a king, to the ambitions he wanted to forget; and, too weak to openly repel against her mute domination, he preferred to flee, to lie, to keep away! On her side, Frederique knew so well his Slav temperament, ardent and soft, vibrating and frail; she had had so many times to forgive this child-man's vagaries who retained the grace, the laughter, even the capricious cruelty of childhood. She had so often seen him on his knees before her, after one of those escapades, in which he risked his happiness and his dignity, that she was utterly discouraged by him as a husband, and as a man, though there remained some respect for the King. And the struggle had endured nearly ten years, although in appearance they were perfectly united.

It was on a rainy winter morning that Elysee Meraut gave the royal child his first lesson. There were books, papers, laid on the table, a light like that of a work or class room, the mother simply dressed in black, which clung round her tall figure, a small lacquer work-table wheeled in front of her, and the master and pupil equally hesitating, equally nervous. Elysee received a fantastic impression of this frail little boy, old-looking and sickly, his forehead already wrinkled as if it bore the six hundred years of his race; he saw in him a predestined chief, a leader of men and peoples, and said to him seriously, his voice trembling:

"Monseigneur, you will one day be a king; you must learn what a king is; listen to me carefully, look at me well, and what my mouth does not express clearly enough, the respect in my eyes will make you understand."

Then, using words and images to suit his intelligence, Elysee explained to him the dogma of divine right, the mission of kings on earth, between God and the people, burdened with responsibilities, duties which other men have not, and which are imposed on them from infancy. That the little prince perfectly understood what was said is hardly probable; perhaps he felt himself enveloped in that vivifying warmth with which gardeners who tend a rare plant surround the delicate fibre, the feeble shoot. As for the Queen, bent over her embroidery, she listened with delighted surprise to the words she had been

despairingly expecting for years, which harmonised with her most secret thoughts, called them forth, stirred them up. So long had she dreamed alone! There were so many things she had not known how to say, and now Elysee had given her the formula. In his presence from the first day, she felt like an unknown musician, an unrealised artist in the presence of the masterly executant of his work. Her vaguest feelings about this grand idea of royalty took form and were magnificently, yet very simply expressed, since a child, quite a little child, could almost understand them. Whilst she gazed at this man, his big features animated by faith and eloquence, she saw in contrast Christian's pretty, indolent face, his irre-*o*ute smile. She heard the eternal "What use?" of all those dethroned kings, the chatterings of princely boudoirs. And it was this plebeian, this weaver's son—whose history she knew—who had gathered together the lost tradition, preserved the relics and the shrine, the sacred fire whose flame was visible on his brow at that moment. Ah! if Christian had been like that, they would be still on the throne or would both have vanished buried under its ruins.

Noon came and the lesson was still going on. In the principal drawing-room where the little court gathered every morning at lunch hour, they began to whisper, to be astonished at the absence of the King and Queen. Some ill temper, caused by hunger and the idleness of waiting for the meal, mingled in the talk. Boscovich, pale with cold and hunger, who for the last two hours had been searching the bushes for some lateflowering plant, was thawing his hands before the high, white marble chimney, altar-shaped, on which Father Alpee sometimes said a private Mass on Sundays. The marquise, majestic and stiff on the edge of a sofa, in a green velvet dress, carried her head high with a tragic air, whilst imparting confidences to the Princess Colette. The poor woman was in despair that her pupil should have been taken from her and entrusted to a person—a wretched person—she had seen him that morning crossing the courtyard.

"My dear, he would have frightened you—long hair, looks mad. Only Father Alpee could have discovered him."

"They say he is very clever," remarked the princess absently.

The other broke in: "Very clever—very clever—what need has a king's son to be crammed up with Greek and Latin like a dictionary?"

"No, no, my dear, such an education requires a special knowledge. I possess it. I was ready, I've studied the Abbe Diguet's treatise on 'The Education of a Prince.' I know by heart the different methods he points out for knowing men, those for keeping away flatterers. The first are six in number, the second seven. They come in this order——"

And she began to repeat them to the princess, who, tired, out of humour, did not listen. The sound of a carriage on the gravel announced the aide-de-camp's arrival. Well, here was someone at least.

"How late you come for orders, Herbert," said the duke gravely.

The prince, although a big fellow, was always in fear of his father, and reddened, stammering some excuses—awfully sorry—not his fault—on duty all night.

"That's why the King is not down yet," said the princess.

A severe look from the duke shut her mouth. The King's conduct concerned nobody.

"Go up quick, sir, his Majesty must be waiting for you."

Herbert obeyed, after having tried to get a smile from his well-loved Colette, whose ill temper, far from being pacified by his arrival, made her sulk on the sofa, her pretty curls disarranged, and her blue dress crumpled in her childish irritation.

"Well, what is it now?" she asked, in a low, impertinent tone, on seeing him reappear, his face upset.

"The King has not returned."

These few words of Herbert had the effect of an electric discharge in the drawing-room.

Colette, very pale, with tears in her eyes, was the first to recover speech.

"Is it possible?"

And the duke, in a curt voice :

"Not returned—why wasn't I told?"

"I hope nothing's happened to him," said the princess in extraordinary excitement.

But Herbert calmed her. Lebeau, the valet, had gone an hour since with the portmanteau. He would certainly have news.

In the ensuing silence, the same disquieting thought came over all, which the Duke de Rosen suddenly expressed :

"What will the Queen say?"

And Boscovich suggested, trembling :

"His Majesty had probably informed her."

"I'm sure not," asserted Colette; "because the Queen said a short while ago, she would introduce the new tutor to the King at lunch."

And, quivering, she added between her teeth, loud enough to be heard:

"I know what I should do in her place."

The Duke turned indignantly, with flaming eyes, towards this little *bourgeoise*, and was probably going to give her a sharp lesson on respect to monarchy, when the Queen appeared, followed by Elysee, who led his royal pupil by the hand. All rose. Frederique, with a beautiful smile of happiness, which had not been seen for a long time, presented M. Meraut. Oh, the mocking, haughty bow of the marquise; she had been rehearsing it for a week. The princess was unable even to make a gesture; from pale she became purple, as she recognised in the new master the strange, tall youth by whose side she had lunched at her uncle's, and who had written Herbert's book. Was he there by chance or some devilish plot? What disgrace for her husband, what a new source of ridicule if his literary deception were found out! She was a trifle reassured by Elysee's cold salute, who must, nevertheless, have certainly recognised her. "He's a sharp fellow," she thought. Unfortunately, Herbert's clumsiness compromised everything. He was astounded at seeing the tutor, and the familiar handshake he gave him, with a "Good-morning, how are you?"

"So you know monsieur?" inquired the Queen, who knew through her chaplain, the history of the "Memorial," and smiled not without some malice.

But she was far too kind to amuse herself long with the cruel sport.

"The King has certainly forgotten us," she said, "so go up and tell him, M. de Rosen."

They had to confess the truth that the King was not in the *hotel*, that he had spent the night out, and to inform her about the portmanteau. It was the first time this had happened, and they expected an outburst from her ardent and haughty nature, the more so that the presence of a stranger aggravated the offence. She remained calm. She just said a few words to the aide-de-camp, asking when he had last seen Christian.

"About three in the morning, his Majesty was walking down the boulevards with Monseigneur the Prince d'Axel."

"Ah, yes, true—I forgot. They had something to talk about together."

In these calm tones she fully recovered her serenity. No one, however, was deceived. Everyone knew the Prince d'Axel, knew what kind of conversation that degraded Royalty was good for.

"Come to lunch," said Frederique, rallying with a sovereign gesture her *encourage* to the tranquillity she forced herself to show.

She wanted someone's arm to pass into the dining-room, and hesitated, the King not being there. And suddenly, turning to the Count de Zara, who was following the whole scene with his big eyes, and the intelligent air of a sickly and precocious child, she said, with a deep, almost respectful tenderness, a serious smile he did not recognise in her: "Come, sire."

Chapter Four

THE KING MAKES MERRY

THREE o'clock in the morning at the Church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île.

Enveloped in silence and darkness the Hotel de Rosen sleeps in all the weight of its heavy old stones, of its massive arched gates, with their antique knocker; and behind the closed shutters, the darkened mirrors only reflect the sleep of centuries, a sleep of which the light paintings on the ceilings appear the dreams, and the murmur of the neighbouring water the unequal, fleeting breathing. But what sleeps best in the whole hotel is the form of Prince Herbert, returned from the club, scarcely a quarter of an hour ago, exhausted, broken down, cursing his harassing existence as a man about town in spite of himself, which deprives him of what he loves most in the world, his horses and his wife; the horses, because the King does not take any pleasure in active life, in the open air of the sportsman; his wife, because the King and Queen, living much apart from one another, only seeing and meeting at meal-times, the aide-de-camp and dame of honour followed them each separately. The princess goes to Saint-Mande long before her husband is awake; at night, when he returns, she is already sleeping, her door bolted. And if he complains, Colette replies majestically, with a little smile at the corner of her dimples: "We surely owe our prince this sacrifice."

Sometimes, when he is exhausted, like to-night, Colette's

husband finds some comfort in stretching himself out in his bed, without conjugal explanations, in resuming his bachelor habits, with his head wrapped in a huge silk foulard. Hardly is he in bed, however, than he is suddenly aroused by the painful feeling of a light coming and going before his eyes, of a little shrill voice at his ear :

"Herbert."

"What ! who's there ?"

"But do be quiet, my goodness ! It's me ; it's Colette."

It is indeed Colette standing before his bed, her dressing-gown open at the throat, short sleeves showing her arms, her hair turned up so as to leave bare the nape of her neck, a little nest of curls ; the glimmer of her little lamp makes her eyes look larger, which are widened by a serious expression, but suddenly amused, as she notices the bewilderment of Herbert, who appears silly enough. The jesting mood, however, does not last long. She gravely places her lamp on the table with the determined air of a woman who intends to make a scene ; and, without regard for the prince's sleepiness, she begins, arms folded, her little hands meeting the dimples of her elbows.

"Now, do you believe this is living—this ? Coming home every day at four in the morning ! Is it proper ? A married man !"

"But, my dear, it's not my fault. I should be only too glad to return earlier to my little Colette, my darling wife whom I—"

Saying this he tries to draw nearer the snowy dressing-gown, whose whiteness tempts him ; but he is coldly repelled.

"I'm not really bothering about you. I know you well—you, you're a big simpleton, incapable of the least—I should like to see it otherwise. But it's the King in his position ! Think of the scandal of such behaviour ! Even if he were free a bachelor. Bachelors must amuse themselves—though, in his case, his rank, his dignity as in exile——" (Oh ! how little Colette raises herself on the high heels of her slippers to talk of the dignity of exile.) "But he's married. And I don't understand that the Queen—she has no blood in her veins that woman."

"Colette !"

"Yes, yes, I know. You are like your father. Everything the Queen does—well, I think she's as guilty as he is. It's

who has brought him to it by her coldness, her interference.

"The Queen is not cold. She is proud."

"Bah! Are you proud when you love? If she loved him, first night he spent outside would be the last. She should be spoken, threatened, asserted her rights. No one is so hardly silent in the presence of faults that kill. So the King now spends all his nights on the boulevard, in the club, with the Prince d'Axel, God knows in what company!"

"Colette! Colette!"

But it was impossible to stop Colette once started. She was as fluent as every *bourgeoise* brought up in this stimulating Paris, where even the dolls speak.

"That woman loves nothing, I tell you, not even her son. If he were not so would she have entrusted him to that savage? They are killing him with work, the poor little fellow! It is not that at night, when asleep, he recites Latin, a lot of French; the marquise told me. The Queen doesn't miss one word. They are banded together against the child. That may reign! but they'll have killed him beforehand. Oh! I hate Meraut, I loathe him."

"Still, he's a good fellow—he might have been very agreeable with the history of that book—he did not say a word."

"Really. Well, I assure you that when you were congratulated on it before the Queen she looked at you with a malicious smile. But you're so simple, my poor Herbert!"

At her husband's annoyed appearance, who had suddenly become quite red, his mouth pouting like a sulky child, the Princess fears she has gone too far. But how can he resist a pretty woman, sitting on the edge of the bed, her head turned towards him, with a movement full of coquetry, that shows off the young, free figure beneath the lace, the ample roundness of the neck, the enticing and malicious eye between the lashes! The prince's honest face soon becomes again amiable, begins even to be extraordinarily animated at the warm touch of the little hand which is abandoned to him, at the fine perfume of the beloved woman. Oh, what does she want to know, the little Colette? Very little, a bit of information: has the King any mistresses, yes or no? Is it the passion for gambling which carries him away or only the taste for pleasure, for violent distractions? The aide-de-camp hesitates before answering. He is afraid of being disloyal to

his companion. But the little hand is so coaxing, so pressing, and so inquisitive, that he no longer resists

"Well, yes ; the King has a mistress at this moment."

Colette's little hand becomes damp and cold in his.

"And who is the mistress ?" asks the young woman in a short, panting voice.

"An actress at the Bouffes—Amy Ferat."

Colette knows this Amy Ferat well ; she even thinks her atrociously ugly.

"Oh," says, Herbert, in excuse, "his Majesty won't keep her long."

Queries Colette, with evident satisfaction :

"Really ?"

Upon which Herbert, enchanted with his success, ventures to touch a satin knot fluttering at the opening of the dressing-gown, and goes on, in a light tone.

"Yes, I'm much afraid that one day or other poor Amy Ferat will get her marmoset."

"A marmoset ! How's that ?"

"Well, I've noticed all those who know the King intimately, know, like myself, that when he is beginning to weary of a *liaison*, he sends one of his marmosets P. P. C. ; a way of his of giving the sack to a woman whom he no longer loves."

"Oh, dreadful," cries the princess indignantly.

"Perfectly true. At the Grand Club they no longer say get rid of a mistress, but send her a marmoset."

He stops, amazed at seeing the princess rise up abruptly, take her lamp and walk stiffly out of the alcove.

"I say, but—Colette—Colette."

She turns round disdainfully, painting :

"I've had quite enough of your vile stories—they're enough to sicken me."

And raising the hanging, she leaves the unfortunate King of Toffs thunderstruck, with his arms extended, and his heart inflamed, not knowing the reason of this untimely visit and of this whirlwind departure. With the quick step of an actress leaving the stage, the floating train of her dressing-gown crumpled on her arm, Colette returns to her room. On the couch, in a cushion of Oriental embroidery, sleeps the prettiest little animal in the world, grey, silky, with hair like feathers, a long tail wound around it, a silver bell tied at its throat with a pink ribbon. It is a delicious marmoset the King sent her some days before in a basket of Italian straw, and which she

and received gratefully, as an act of homage. Ah! if she had only known the meaning of the present. She furiously grips the little creature, this bundle of living and scratching silk, which shine two human eyes, suddenly awakened, opens the window on the quay, and, with a ferocious gesture, cries: "There, you dirty beast."

The little monkey falls on the wharf; and only does he disappear and die in the night, but also the dream, frail and capricious as himself, of the poor little creature, who throws herself on the bed, hides her head in the pillow and sobs.

Their love had lasted nearly a year. The King only had made a sign. Dazzled, fascinated, Collette de Rosen had fallen into his arms—she who, up to then, had kept herself an honest woman, not for love of her husband or of virtue, but because there was in her bird's brain let a care for the cleanliness of plumage which had kept her from degrading falls, and besides, because she was a true Frenchwoman, of that race of women whom Molière, long before modern physiologists, declared to be without temperament, merely imaginative and vain.

Presently scruples of remorse had come over the King, the complex and naïf remorse of a Slav and a Catholic. His caprice being satisfied, he began to feel the odium of this liaison so near the Queen, almost under her eyes, the peril of those stealthy, rapid meetings in hotels where their incognito might be betrayed, and the cruelty there was in deceiving a fellow so kindly as that poor, big devil of a Herbert, who spoke of his wife with an ever-unquenchable tenderness, and did not suspect, when the King joined him at the club, his eyes shining, his complexion flushed, with a perfume of successful love, that he had come from Colette's arms. But more embarrassing still was the Duke de Rosen, very mistrustful of the principles of this daughter-in-law who was not of his caste, uneasy for his son, whom he thought to be a cuckold—he said the word downright, like an old trooper—and feeling himself responsible for the whole thing, because his avarice had caused the *mesalliance*. He watched Colette, brought her there and back morning and evening, would always have followed her, if the supple creature had not continually slipped through his big, awkward fingers. There was a silent struggle between them. From the window of the steward's house, the duke, sitting at his bureau, saw, not without annoyance, his pretty daughter-in-law, in delicious

toilettes, which she devised with her fashionable tailor ensconced in her carriage.

"You're going out?"

"On the Queen's business," triumphantly replied the little Sauvadon behind her veil, and it was true. Frederique mingled very little with the noise of Paris, and willingly left her commissions to her dame of honour.

One morning the duke thought Colette so serious-looking on her departure from Saint-Mande, with an excitement very noticeable in her grisette type—real sportsmen have these sudden inspirations—that he followed her a long time, a very long time, up to a famous restaurant in the Quai D'Orsay. By means of imagination and skill, the princess had been able to dispense with the ceremonious meal at the Queen's table, and came to lunch with her lover in a private room. They were eating before a low window, giving a splendid view: the Seine gilded by the sun, the Tuileries behind in a mass of stone and trees, and quite near the masts of the training-ship. The weather was the weather of an assignation, the warmth of a fine day tempered by sharp breezes. Never had Colette laughed so heartily; the laugh was the pearly triumph of her grace, and Christian, who loved her when she chose to remain the woman of easy virtue that he loved in her, enjoyed the excellent lunch in his mistress's company. Suddenly she perceived, on the opposite pavement, her father-in-law walking up and down with measured step, determined to wait as long as needful: a regular guard before the door which the old man knew to be the only exit from the restaurant, and where he watched the entry of the well-groomed, well-set-up officers coming from the neighbouring cavalry barracks; for, as a former general of Pandours, he thought the army irresistible, and did not doubt that his daughter-in-law had some spurs-and-sabretache intrigue.

Great was the anxiety of Colette and the King, and recalled the quandary of the *savant* perched on the palm-tree, at whose foot yawned a crocodile. Sure of the discretion of the incorruptibility of the restaurant *personnel*, they knew at least that the crocodile would not come up. But how to get away? The King might manage it. He had time to weary the animal's patience. But Colette! The Queen would expect her, join, perhaps, her suspicions to old Rosen's. The master of the establishment, who, at Christan's request, had come up and been informed of the state of things, could think of nothing better than piercing

the wall of the neighbouring house, as in times of revolution ; then he hit upon a far more simple experiment. The princess must put on the clothes of a pastry cook's boy, and carry on her head, in a basket, her dress, her petticoats, and dress again, in the barmaid's room, who lived in a neighbouring street. Colette protested greatly at first. Appear as a scullion before the King ! She had to do so, however, for fear of the most serious catastrophe ; and the clean suit of a boy, some fourteen years old, transformed the Princess de Rosen, *nee* Sauvadon, into the prettiest, most coquettish little pastry-cook's lad that ever walked the streets of Paris at *gourmands'* hours. The duke saw without suspicion two boys pass out, basket on head, clothed in an appetising odour of hot pastry, which caused him to feel cruelly the first pangs of hunger ; he was fasting, poor man ! Upstairs the King, still prisoner, but relieved of a grievous care, read, drank his Roederer, looking now and then through a corner of the curtain, to see if the crocodile was still there.

In the evening, on his return to Saint-Mande, old Rosen was received with the princess's most ingenuous smile. He knew he had been bested, and breathed not a word of the adventure. It got bruited about, however. For a week all Paris was amused by the story of the little pastry-cook's lad. The names, whispered as low as is possible for such great names, did not penetrate Herbert's thick skin. But the Queen had a suspicion of the adventure, for she, who, since their dreadful scene at Leybach, had never made any reproaches to the King about his conduct, took him aside a short time after his one day as they were leaving the table.

"People are talking a good deal," she said gravely, without glancing at him, "about a scandalous story in which your name is mixed up. Oh ! don't defend yourself. I don't want to hear any more—only, think of this which is in your care."

She pointed to the crown, with its radiance veiled in the crystal casket.

"Endeavour that neither shame nor ridicule may reach it. It is necessary for your son to be able to wear it."

Did she know about the whole adventure ? Did she set the right name on the woman's face, half-unveiled by slander ? Frederique was so strong, so self-contained, that nobody about her could say. Christian, however, took it as a warning, and his fear of scenes, of stories, the need of his weak character for pleasant faces round him, decided him to take from its cage

the prettiest, the tamest of his marmosets, and send it to Princess Colette. She wrote, but he did not answer; he did not heed her sighs, but continued speaking to her in the tone of courteous playfulness which attracted women. No longer feeling the remorse which, as his passion diminished, had grown keener, delivered from the tyranny of a love far more imperious than his wife's, he gave free, full rein to pleasure hunting.

He went the pace with the ardour of a youth of twenty. His *liaison* with Madame de Rosen had arrested him for a time on his descent to cheap debauch, an incline that resembled the narrow staircases of the night restaurants, flooded with light, well-carpeted upstairs, descended step by step by the incipient drunkard, increasing in speed at the bottom in the brisk air from the open doors, and which lead straight to the gutter, in the vague hour of criminals and tramps. Christian now abandoned himself to this descent, to this fall, and what encouraged, intoxicated him more than the dessert wines was the little court, the clan by which he was surrounded—ruined gentlemen in search of royal dupes, journalistic men about town whose paid articles amused him and who, proud of this intimacy with the illustrious exile took him behind the scenes of the theatres, where the women excited and alluring, had only eyes for him, their enamelled cheeks blushing an affected confusion. Soon familiar with the boulevard language, he spoke it rather less vulgarly than most thanks to his foreign accent. There was one word he affected *rigolo* (amusing). He used it apropos of everything. Plays, novels, public or private events, were or were not *rigolo*. It saved monseigneur all trouble. One night, at the end of a supper, Amy Ferat, who was drunk, was irritated by the word and shouted:

"Hi! I say, Rigolo!"

He liked the familiarity. At least she did not treat him as a king. He made her his mistress, and long after his intrigue with the fashionable actress had finished, the nickname remained, like that of *Queue-de-Poule*, given to Prince d'Axel, no one knew why.

Rigolo and Queue-de-Poule became chums, never separated, hunted all game together, united their almost similar destinies even in the boudoir. The disgrace of the Crown Prince being really an exile, he spent it as pleasantly as possible, and for the last ten years had been going the pace in all the

averns of the boulevards with an undertaker-like enthusiasm. The King of Illyria had his room in the Hotel d'Axel in the Champs Elysees. At first he slept there occasionally, presently as often as at Saint-Mande. His explanations for his absence left the Queen quite calm, but threw the princes into a black distress. No doubt she had hoped to recapture his fickle heart. She tried a thousand coquettish inventions—new adornments, and coiffures, combinations of shades according with the best points of her beauty. And what disappointment, when at seven o' clock at night the King did not appear, and Frederique, imperturbably serene, after saying : "His Majesty will not dine," put little Zara's high chair in the place of honour. The nervous Colette, obliged to be silent to hide her chagrin, would have welcomed an outburst from the Queen, which would have avenged them both ; but Frederique, hardly paler than usual, kept her sovereign calm, even when the princess, with cruel feminine address, with cutting insinuations, essayed some revelations about the Paris clubs, the grossness of men's talk, the still grosser amusements to which their unpunctuality and absences from home led them, and the mad gambling parties involving whole fortunes, the eccentric bets entered in a special book, curious to dip into, the golden book of human aberration. But all in vain. The Queen was not touched by these pinpricks, did not understand, or did not want to.

Only once she betrayed herself, one morning, in the wood of Saint-Mande, during a ride.

It was a keen, chilly day in March, and the water in the lake rippled back on the still flowerless banks. A few buds were appearing on the leafless bushes, which showed the red berries of winter ; and the horses, going side by side on a path full of dead branches, made them crack, whilst the new leather and rattling curb-chains made a luxurious noise in the deserted silence of the wood. The two women, both good riders, rode slowly. Colette soon started her favourite subject, as she always did when alone with the Queen. She did not dare to attack the King directly, but she spoke about his *entourage*, the gentlemen of the Grand Club, whom she knew through Herbert, through Parisian gossip, and whom she skilfully handled, beginning with the Prince d'Axel. Really, she did not understand how anyone could keep company with such a man, spending his life in gambling, in guzzling, finding amusement only in bad company, sitting at night on the boule-

ward by the side of low persons, drinking with the first-comer like a cabdriver, exchanging familiarities with the vilest of comedians. Fancy that being a crown prince—that! He took pleasure in degrading, in soiling royalty in his person.

She went on, she went on, with a fine wrath, whilst the Queen, deliberately absentminded, her eyes expressionless, stroked the neck of her horse and pressed it a little, as if to escape her dame of honour's stories. But Colette rode at the same pace.

"Besides, he comes of a wretched stock, that Prince d'Axel. His uncle's conduct is like his own; a king who flaunts his mistresses so impudently before his court, before his wife. One asks oneself what kind of a sacrificed-slave nature a queen must have to put up with such outrages."

That time the thrust had gone home. Frederique, trembling, her eyes veiled, revealed on her now hollowed features so pained and aged an expression that Colette felt moved at seeing the proud queen, whose heart she had never been able to reach, descend to the level of feminine suffering. But she very quickly recovered all her pride.

"She of whom you speak is a queen," she remarked, "and it would be a great injustice to judge her like other women. Other women may be openly happy or unhappy, weep out all their tears, and cry out if the pain is too much. But queens! their sorrows as wives, as mothers, they must hide, swallow everything. Can a queen flee when she is outraged? Can she sue for a separation, give that joy to the enemies of the throne? No; at the risk of seeming cruel, blind, indifferent, she must always keep an unmoved brow to uphold the crown. And it is not pride, but the feeling of our greatness that sustains us. It is that which makes us go out in an open carriage between child and husband, in spite of threats of assassination; it is that which makes exile and its muddy sky less grievous, which, in fact, lends us the strength to endure some cruel affronts, of which you ought to be the last to speak to me, Princess de Rosen."

She grew excited as she spoke, rushed on towards the end, then touched up her horse with a vigorous "hep," which carried her through the wood like a whirlwind, in a wild gallop.

Thenceforth Colette left the Queen alone; but, as her nerves needed distraction, relief, she turned her anger against Elysee, and definitely joined the marquise's party, for the royal household was divided into two camps. Elysee had

hardly anybody for him but Father Alpee, whose rough speech, ever-ready repartee, were of great help on occasion ; but the monk made frequent journeys to Illyria, charged with missions between the mother-house in the Rue des Fourneaux and the Franciscan convents in Zara and Ragusa. At least that was the pretext of his mysterious absences, from which he returned always more ardent, climbing the stairs with great, furious strides, rolling the rosary in his fingers, a prayer between his teeth, which he chewed like a ball. He was shut up for long hours with the Queen, then started off again, leaving all the marquise's coterie leagued against the tutor. From the old duke, whom Meraut's neglected appearance, brushed-back hair, shocked from the standpoint of military and worldly discipline, to the valet Lebeau, the instinctive enemy of all independence, to the humblest groom or scullion courtier of M. Lebeau, to the harmless Boscovich, who did like the others through cowardice, through respect for numbers, there was a regular coalition against the new master. It showed itself less by deeds than by words, looks, attitudes, by those little nervous skirmishes which are brought on by a common life amongst people who hate each other. Oh, those attitudes, Madame de Silvis's speciality ! Disdainful, haughty, ironical, bitter she played her part in the presence of Elysee, knowing especially well how to imitate a sort of respectful pity, stifled sighs, the whites of her eyes cast up to the ceiling, whenever she found herself with the little prince.

"You are not suffering, monseigneur ?"

She touched him with her long thin fingers, enfeebled him with her trembling caresses. Then the Queen, in a cheerful voice :

"Come, marquise you'll make Zara believe he is ill."

"I find his hands, his forehead, rather hot."

"He has come from outside—it's the keen air."

And she would take the child away, rather disturbed by the remarks repeated around her, the legend in the house that monseigneur was made to work too much.

Elysee was only prevented from returning, as he had done once before, to the Quartier Latin, by his affection for the Queen. Living always in intimacy with Frederique, through the child, he had conceived for her a fanatical devotion, composed of respect, of admiration, of superstitious faith. In his eyes she summed up, symbolised, the whole monarchical ideal and belief. For the Queen he remained, he found courage to

bring his hard task to an end. How difficult to get the least thing into that little head of the King's son ! He was charming, that poor Zara, gentle and good. He was not lacking in will. One divined in him his mother's serious, upright soul, together with something light-headed, too childish for his age. The mind was visibly backward in that small, aged, stunted body, which play did not tempt, on which lay a dreaminess that went sometimes as far as torpor. The Queen attended all the lessons, holding in her fingers an embroidery which never got further, and in her beautiful eyes that attentiveness, so precious to the master, who felt her vibrating to all his ideas, even to those he did not express. That was what especially bound them together, by the dreams, the chimeras, that which floats above convictions and spreads them. She had taken him for counsellor, for confidant, affecting to speak to him only in the King's name.

"M. Meraut, his Majesty desires your opinion about this."

And Elysee's astonishment was great at never hearing the King himself mention those questions that interested him so much. Christian, too, treated him with a certain regard, spoke to him in a tone of familiar companionship, excellent, but very futile. Sometimes, as he went through the study, he stopped a moment to listen to the lesson, then, laying his hand on the dauphin's shoulder :

"Don't push him too much," he would say in an undertone, like an echo of the subalterns in the household, "you don't want to make a *savant* of him."

"I want to make a king of him," Frederique would reply proudly.

And, as her husband made a discouraging gesture :

"Isn't he going to reign one day ?"

To which he would answer :

"Yes, yes !"

And after a low bow, the door being closed to cut short further discussion, he would be heard humming the tune of an operetta in vogue.

"He will reign. He will reign."

In fact Elysee could not make head or tail of this affable, superficial, perfumed, coquettish, capricious prince, sometimes lounging on sofas with the weariness of enervation, whom he believed to be the hero of Ragusa, the king of energetic will and bravery mentioned in the "Memorial." However, in spite of Frederique's skill in masking the emptiness of that crowned

forehead, and although she continually hid herself behind him, some unforeseen circumstance was always occurring in which their true natures appeared.

One morning, after lunch, as they entered the drawing-room, Frederique, opening the paper, *The Courier of Illyria*, which she was always the first to read, uttered such a loud and dolorous cry, that the King, who was about to go out, stopped, everyone in a moment surrounding the Queen. Frederique handed the paper to Boscovich.

"Read."

It was the account of a sitting of the Diet of Leybach, and the resolution which had been passed to restore to the exiled sovereigns all the property of the Crown, more than two hundred millions, on the express condition—

"Bravo," cried the nasal voice of Christian.

"Well, that suits me, that does I"

"Read on," said the Queen severely.

"On the express condition that Christian II. renounces for himself and his descendants all rights to the throne of Illyria."

There was an outburst of indignation in the *salon*; old Rosen was suffocating, Father Alpee's cheeks were of a linen whiteness, which made his beard and eyes blacker.

"This must be answered—we must not lie down under the insult," said the Queen, and her indignation sought Meraut, who for a few moments was making notes at a corner of the table with a fevered pencil.

"Here is what I should write," he said, coming forward, and he read, under the form of a letter to a Royalist deputy, a spirited proclamation to the Illyrian people, in which, after having rejected the outrageous proposal made, the King reassured, encouraged his friends in the stirring terms of a head of a family far away from his children.

The Queen clapped her hands enthusiastically, seized the paper, and handed it to Boscovich.

"Quick, quick, translate it, and send it off. Don't you think so?" she added remembering Christian was there, and that eyes were upon them.

"No doubt, no doubt," much perplexed, biting his nails hard; "that's all very fine, only—there you are—how are we to get on?"

She turned quickly, very pale, as if struck hard between her shoulders.

"Get on—if we can get on? Is it the King who speaks?"

He rejoined very calmly:

"When Ragusa was without bread we had to surrender with the best will in the world."

"Well, this time, if bread is lacking, we'll turn beggars and go from door to door—but royalty will not surrender."

Elysee had, for the first time, a rapid, clear vision of what happened in the royal household.

Suddenly Christian II., turning towards the duke, standing against the mantelpiece, his head bowed:

"Rosen."

"Sire."

"You alone can tell us. How do we stand? Can we last?"

The head of the household gave a haughty gesture.

"Certainly."

"How long? Do you know? About—?"

"Five years, I've calculated."

"Without privations for anybody? Without any of those we love suffering?"

"Exactly so, sire."

"You're sure?"

"Sure," affirmed the old man, drawing up his huge figure.

"Well, then, it's all right. Meraut, give me our letter, that I may sign it before going out."

Then, in an undertone, taking the pen from his hand:

"Just look at Madame de Silvis. Wouldn't you believe she was going to sing '*Sombre Foret*'?"

The marquise, indeed, returning from the garden with the little prince, was inspired by the dramatic atmosphere in the *salon* and, adorned with her green feathered toque, her velvet spencer, her hand on her heart, certainly had the fixed pose of an opera singer, about to begin a romantic *cavatina*.

Read in full Parliament, published in all the papers, the protest was also, by Elysee's advice, autographed and sent into the country—thousands of copies, which Father Alphee passed through the custom house under the name of "Objects of Piety," together with chaplets of olive and Jericho roses. Royalist opinion was spurred on by it. Dalmatia especially, where the Republican idea had only slightly penetrated, was moved at hearing its King's eloquent words distributed by the mendicant monks of Saint Francis, who opened their wallets

at the farm doors, and paid for eggs and butter with a small printed bundle. Addresses to the King were soon covered with signatures, and those crosses which are so touching in their ignorant goodwill. Pilgrimages were organised.

Some time after that Elysee was the involuntary witness of a scene which enlightened him completely about Christian's character and his relations with the Queen.

It was on Sunday after Mass : the little *hotel*, with an appearance of unusual festivity, opened wide its gates on the Rue Herbillon ; all the servants stood in a double row in the hall. That day's reception was of the greatest importance. A Royalist deputation of the members of the Diet was expected—the *élite* and flower of the party, coming to pay homage of fidelity to the King and consult with him about the measures to be taken for an early restoration.

It was a really great event, whose solemnity was cheered by a magnificent winter's sun gilding and warming the vast solitude of the reception-room, the King's high arm-chair, prepared as a throne, awakening the rubies, sapphires, topazes of the crown into sparkling glitter. Elysee, keeping away from the stir, alone in the schoolroom, thought over the possible consequence of the coming interview. Presently the heavy rolling of the gala carriages, which had gone to fetch the deputies at their hotel, was heard in the courtyard, and the bells rang loudly as they arrived. Carriage doors slammed, footsteps were deadened on the carpets of the hall and *salon* in a murmur of respectful words. Then ensued a long silence, at which Meraut was surprised, for he expected the King's speech.

What was happening ? Why this hesitation in the arranged order of the ceremony ?

At that moment, skirting the walls, the blackened espaliers of the cold, sunlit garden, the man whom he believed to be in the next room, presiding at the official reception, appeared before him, walking with a stiff, awkward gait. He must have come in by the private door, hidden in the ivy of the Avenue Daumesnil, and he was coming on slowly, with difficulty. Elysee at first thought of a duel, some accident, and a short time afterwards his idea was confirmed by the noise of a fall in the storey above, accompanied by a crash. He went up quickly to the King's room.

The door was open.

The Queen, erect, severe, stood opposite Christian, who

was leaning against the wall, discomposed and pale, his hat on the back of his head, his long fur coat half opened, and showing his tumbled dress coat, his white cravat untied, his broad linen shirt front dirtied, everything betraying the exhaustion of the past night and the disorder of drunkenness.

The Queen's voice trembled with the violent effort she made to restrain herself.

"You must—you must—come."

But he muttered, in a very low voice, with an ashamed air :

"Can't—you see I can't—later—promise."

Then he stammered excuses with a stupid laugh in a childish voice: it wasn't what he had drunk, oh no—but the air, the cold as he came from supper.

"Yes, yes—I know—it's all the same. You must come down—let them see you, only let them see you I'll speak to them myself. I know what is to be said."

And as he still remained motionless, mute now with a drowsiness which began to spread over his horribly relaxed face, Frederique's wrath grew.

"But you must understand that it's a question of our fate, Christian, it's your crown, your son's crown, which is at stake at this moment. Come along now—I beg you. I will it."

She was superb in her strong will, whose magnetism in her sea-blue eyes visibly affected the King. She picked him up with her gaze, tried to strengthen him, pull him together, helped him to take off his hat, his overcoat. He stiffened for a moment on his weakened legs, made a few tottering steps, resting his burning hands on the marble of the Queen's hands. All at once, however, she felt him giving way, herself recoiled from his feverish touch, and suddenly repelled him with violence, with disgust, let him fall at full length on a sofa; then, without a look at this crumpled, inert, already snoring mass, she left the room, passed Elysee without seeing him, erect, her eyes half shut, murmuring, in the bewildered, dolorous voice of a sleep-walker: "I am quite sick of acting as wire-puller to this fool of a king."

Chapter Five

J. TOM LEVIS, FOREIGN AGENT

OF all the Parisian dens, of all the Ali Baba caverns with which the great city is mined and countermined, there is none better known, so interestingly organised, as the Levis Agency.

You know it, everybody knows it, at least from outside. It is in the Rue Royale, at the corner of the Faubourg Saint-Honore, in full view of the carriages going to the Bois or returning from it, so that no one can escape seeing the advertisement attached to the sumptuous ground floor, reached by eight steps, with its high plate glass windows, on which are emblazoned in red, blue, and gold, the escutcheons of the principal Powers in Europe: eagles, unicorns, leopards, a whole heraldic menagerie. At thirty metres across the street, which is as large and broad as a boulevard, the Levis Agency attracts the glances of the least curious. Everyone asks himself: "What do they sell there?" "What don't they sell there?" would be nearer the mark. On each window can be read in beautiful gold letters: "Wines, Liqueurs, Comestibles, Pale Ale, Kummel, Raki, Caviare, Preserved Cod," or "Ancient and Modern Furniture, Tapestries, Carpets from Smyrna and Ispahan"; further on: "Paintings by Old Masters, Marbles and Terra-cotta, Arms and Armour for Decoration, Medals, Panoplies"; elsewhere: "Money Changed, Discount, Foreign Money"; or again: "Universal Library, Newspapers of every Country, in every Language" by the side of; "Houses for Sale and on Lease, Shootings, Seaside, Country"; or "Private Enquiries, Discretion, Celerity".

This swarm of inscriptions and brilliant heraldry greatly darkens the shop window, and makes it impossible to see clearly the objects displayed there.

You distinguish vaguely bottles of strange shape and colour, carved wood chairs, pictures, furs, then, in wooden plates, a few half-opened rolls of piastres and bundles of banknotes.

But the vast basement of the Agency, opening on to the pavement by a kind of low, grated, cellar windows, serves as a solid basis to the rather gaudy display of the big shop, and gives the impression of a prosperous London warehouse, sustaining the *chic* of a window in the Boulevard de la Madeleine.

Thus placed, solidly established, in the midst of a Parisian eddy, the net catches, as they pass, a number of big and small fish, even the small fry of the Seine, the most subtle of all; and if you pass there at about three in the afternoon you will find it almost always full.

At the glass door in the Rue Royale, high and light, domi-

nated by a broad pediment of carved wood, the entry to the department of novelties or of fashions, stands the porter of the house, got up in military style, turning the handle as soon as he sees you, holding an umbrella, when needful, to customers as they leave their carriages. Before you is a huge hall, divided by barriers, by grated wickets, into a number of compartments, regular boxes, right and left to the end. The dazzling light makes the waxed floor shine, and the wainscoting, the fashionable frock coats and the curled hair of the employees, all stylish, good-looking, but with a foreign accent and air. There are olive complexions, pointed skulls, narrow-wish Asiatic shoulders, American goatees and china-blue eyes, red-faced Germans; and in whatever tongue the buyer gives his order, he is always certain to be understood, for all languages are spoken at the Agency except Russian, which does not matter, since Russians speak every language except their own.

The crowd comes and goes round the wickets, six waiting on the light chairs—ladies and gentlemen in travelling costume, a mixture of Astrachan caps, Scotch caps, long veils floating above waterproofs, dust cloaks, check tweeds covering both sexes indiscriminately, with rugs and leather bags—a real railway station waiting-room crowd, gesticulating, talking loudly, with the indifference, the aplomb of people in a foreign land, producing in several languages the same confused, varied sound that you may hear at the bird-fanciers' on the Quai de Gevres. At the same time, the corks of pale ale bottles pop, piles of gold tinkle on the wood of the counters. There is a perpetual ringing of electric bells, whistles in speaking tubes, the unrolling of the parchment plan of a house, scales played on a piano, or cries from a tribe of Samoyedes round an enormous carbon photograph.

And then, from one compartment to another, the clerks call out information—a number, a name of a person or street; they are smiling, attentive, becoming all at once majestic, icy, indifferent, their physiognomy completely detached from the affairs of this world, when an unfortunate, dismayed customer, despatched from wicket to wicket, bends over to speak to them in an undertone of a certain mysterious business which seems to overwhelm them with surprise. Sometimes, weary at being looked at, as if he were a waterspout, or an acrolite, the man grows impatient; demands to see J. Tom Levis himself, who will certainly know about his affair. He is then told,

with a superior smile, that J. Tom Levis is busy—that Tom Levis has people with him—and not any wretched little business like yours, not insignificant people as yourself, my good fellow—come, look over there, right at the far end. A door has just opened; J. Tom Levis shows himself just for a moment, more majestic in himself than all his clerks put together—majestic with his round stomach, majestic with his skull shining like the office floor, with the toss back of his small head, his distant glance the despotic gesture of his short arm, and the solemnity with which he asks, shouting very loud, with his insular accent, “if the parcel has been sent to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales,” while with his free hand he keeps hermetically closed behind him the door of his office, in order to let it be understood that the august personage shut in there is one of those who must not be disturbed on any pretext. It goes without saying that the Prince of Wales has never been to the Agency, and that not the smallest parcel has ever been sent him; but you may imagine the effect of that name on the crowd in that shop, and on the solitary customer to whom Tom has just said in his office:

“Excuse me—one minute—a little information I want.”

Humbug! humbug! there is no more a Prince of Wales behind the door of the private room than there is Raki or Kummel in the eccentric bottles in the window, English or Viennese beer in the barrels in the basement, no more than merchandise is carried in the emblazoned, gilded, varnished carriages, initialled J. T. L., which pass at a gallop, all the more quickly that they are empty, through the fashionable quarters of Paris, a perambulating and noisy advertisement, pushing down the roads with that wild activity which distinguishes men and animals in Tom Levi's Agency. Should a poor devil, intoxicated by all this gold, burst the money-changing window with his fist, and greedily plunged his bleeding hand into the platters, he would withdraw it full of counters; if he takes this enormous bundle of banknotes, it is a twenty-five-pound note he will carry off on the top of a quire of common paper. Nothing in the shop front, nothing in the basement, nothing—nothing whatever! But how about the port those Englishmen are tasting? the coin which that boyar has carried off in exchange for his roubles? the little bronze packed up for that Greek lady?—oh, good gracious, nothing simpler: the English beer comes from the tavern next door; the gold from a money changer on the boulevard; the

work of art from Thingumbob's shop in the Rue du Quatre Septembre. There are two or three employees who await in the basement the orders transmitted through the speaking tubes, and they execute them quickly.

Going out through the courtyard of the neighbouring house they return in a few minutes, emerge from the spiral staircase with its elaborate banister and crystal globe, which forms a communication between the two floors. There is the article asked for—guaranteed, labelled J. T. L.

And don't bother, my prince, if that one does not please you it can be changed, the cellars of the Agency are well stocked. It's a trifle dearer than anywhere else, only twice or three times dearer; but isn't that better than going the round of the shops, where they don't understand a word of what you say, in spite of the promise of the notice: "Mar spricht Deutsch"—those shops on the boulevards where the foreigner, surrounded, circumvented, never finds anything but the remnants, the refuse of Parisian things, the bad debts of the ledgers, the bottoms of boxes, articles which are no longer in fashion, what is left over from the past years, more tarnished even by the date than by the dust or sun of the shop window. Oh! the Parisian shopkeeper, obsequious and contemptuous disdainful and pertinacious, is done for. The foreigner steers clear of him; he is at last tired of being so ferociously exploited, and not only by the shopkeeper, but by the hotel where he sleeps, the restaurant where he eats, the cab he hails in the street, the ticket agent who sends him to yawn in empty theatres.

At least at Levis's Agency, where you find everything you want, you are sure not to be cheated, for J. Tom Levis is an Englishman, and the commercial loyalty of the English is known in both worlds.

J. Tom Levis is superlatively English, from the square tip of his quaker shoes to his long frock coat falling over his green check trousers, to his pyramid-shaped, narrow brimmed hat, showing up his fat, red, and good-natured face. The loyalty of Albion can be read in that complexion, nourished with *biftecks*, that mouth extending from ear to ear, the flaxen silk of those whiskers, made uneven by the mania of their proprietor to gnaw at one of them—always the same one—in his moments of perplexity; it can be divined in his stubby and, with its fingers covered with red down, laden with rings. Loyal also appear the eyes beneath a broad pair of spectacles

finely mounted in gold, so loyal that when J. Tom Levis happens to lie—the best men are liable to it—his eyeballs, by a curious nervous action, begin to turn round like little wheels revolving in the perspective of a gyroscope.

What completes J. Tom Levis's English physiognomy is his hansom, the first vehicle of the kind that was seen in Paris, the natural shell of that original being. If he has a rather complicated affair on hand, one of those critical moments, such as occur amid traffic, when one feels over-pressed, says Tom, "I'll take the hansom," and he's sure to find some idea in it. He combines, he weighs, he comments, whilst the Parisians see the transparent box on wheels passing by, with the silhouette of a preoccupied man energetically munching his right whisker. It was in the hansom that he imagined his finest strokes, towards the end of the Empire. Ah! it was a good time then. Paris, crammed full with foreigners, and not foreigners of passage, but a settling down of exotic fortunes needing only pleasure and luxury. We had the Turk, Hussein Bey, and the Egyptian, Mehemet Pasha, and the Princess de Verkatscheff, who threw all the silver of the Ural Mountains from the fourteen windows of her first floor in the Boulevard Malesherbes, and the American, Bergson, whose enormous revenues from his petroleum wells Paris was devouring, and Nabobs—fleets of Nabobs of all colours, yellow, brown, red—mottling the promenades and theatres, eager to spend, to enjoy, as if they foresaw they would have to leave the great orgy before the terrible explosion that was about to burst the roofs, shatter the mirrors and windows.

Now J. Tom Levis was the indispensable intermediary in all these pleasures, so that not a louis changed hands without his having previously gnawed at it, and, besides his foreign customers, there were some Parisian men about town, amateurs of rare game, poachers of guarded preserves, who applied to friend Tom as the cleverest, the most skilful agent, and also because their secrets seemed safer behind his barbarous French, his difficulty in speaking. The seal of J. T. L. was set on all the scandalous stories at the end of the Empire. It was in J. Tom Levis's name that pit-box No. 9 at the opera Comique was always engaged, where Baroness Mills came every night for an hour to listen to her *tenorino*, whose handkerchief, soaked with perspiration and white lead, she would carry away, after the *cavatina*, in the lace of her bodice. In J. Tom Levis's name, too, was the small hotel let in the

Avenue de Clichy to the two brothers Sismondo for the same woman, without their suspecting it; they were partners in a bank and could never leave the office at the same time. Ah! the Agency books at that time! What fine novels in few lines!

"A house with two entrances on the road to Saint-Cloud. Rent, furniture, buying out tenant—so much."

And below:

"General's commission—so much."

"Country house at Petit-Vallin, near Plombières. Garden, coach-house, two entrances, buying out tenant—so much."

And always: "General's commission." That general had his place in the Agency's accounts!

If Tom grew rich at that period, he also spent a lot, not on gambling, or horses, or women, but in gratifying the whims of an uneducated, childish nature, a most fantastic imagination which brooked no delay between a dream and its realisation. He once wanted an avenue of acacias on his estate at Courbevoie; but, as trees grow slowly, for a week, all along the banks of the Seine, very bare and gloomy, with factories round about, big carts could be seen moving onward, each carrying an acacia, whose green leaves, shaken by the slow movement of the wheels, were reflected in the water in trembling shadows. This suburban property, which J. Tom Lewis dwelt in all the year, according to the custom of the big London merchants, was at first a mere country box, consisting of ground floor and attics, and became a source of enormous expense to him. As his affairs prospered and extended, he had proportionately increased his estate; and from building to building, from acquisition to acquisition, he had come to possess a park composed of annexes and market gardens together with bits of bush, a strange property, in which were revealed his tastes, his ambitions, his English eccentricity, deformed, distorted still more by his *bourgeois* ideas and his fallacious attempts at art. On the quite ordinary house, to which upper storeys had visibly been added, spread an Italian terrace with a marble balustrade, flanked by two Gothic towers and communicating by a covered bridge with another building like a *chalet*, with openwork balconies clad with ivy—all this plastered in stucco, made of bricks, looking like a Black Forest toy, with a luxury of turrets, battlements, weathercocks, dormer windows. Then, in the park, bristling kiosks, belvederes, glass-houses, basins; the black bastion of a huge

reservoir dominating a real mill, whose sails, alive to the least wind, creaked, turned with the everlasting grinding of their cle.

Truly, in the narrow space traversed by the suburban Parisian trains, many burlesque villas defile by the square of a carriage window, like fantastic visions, nightmares, the effort of a shopkeeper's wildly prancing brain. None, however, is comparable with Tom Levis's folly, except his neighbour Spricht's villa, the great Spricht, the famous ladies' tailor.

That magnificent personage does not stay in Paris longer than business demands—just the three hours in the afternoon when he holds his consultations on coquetry in his big laboratory on the boulevards, then immediately returns to his house at Courbevoie. The secret of his compulsory retreat is, that the dear Spricht—"the dear" of all his ladies—although he possesses in his drawers, among the marvellous patterns of his Lyon's wares, specimens of the writing of all the best gloved hands in Paris, has been obliged to satisfy himself with this intimacy of correspondence; that he is not received in any of the houses which he dresses, and that his fine connections have spoilt for him all relations with the commercial world to which he belongs. So he leads a very retired life, surrounded, like all *parvenus*, only by crowd of poor kinsfolk, and priding himself on treating them like a prince. His only distraction, which lends the zest necessary to that kind of boomed life, is Tom Levis's neighbourhood and emulation, composed of the contempt and hate they have for each other, without certainly knowing why, and therefore the less capable of conciliation.

When Spricht raises a turret—Spricht is German, he loves the romantic castles, valleys, ruins, he has a passion for the middle ages—J. Tom Levis at once builds a verandah. When Tom knocks a wall down Spricht cuts down all his hedges. There is a story of a pavilion all his hedges. There is a story of a pavilion built by Tom which spilt Spricht's view towards Saint-Cloud. The tailor then raised the gallery of his pigeon-house. The other replied by a fresh storey. Spricht did not let himself be beaten, and the two buildings, by help of many ladders and workmen, continued their ascent till one fine night the wind easily blew them both down, owing to their frail construction. Spricht, returning from a journey to Italy, brought back from Venice a gondola, a real gondola, moored in the small harbour at the end of his property; a week later,

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pft ! pft ! a pretty steam yacht, with sails, came alongside Tom Levis's quay, stirring up in the water the reflections of the turrets, roofs, battlements of his villa.

To keep up such a pace, the Empire would have had to last for ever, and its last hour had come. The war, the siege, departure of foreigners, were a real disaster for the two tradesmen, more particularly for Tom Levis, whose property was laid waste by the invasion, whilst Spricht's was spared. But, on the return peace, the struggle between the two rivals began more vigorously than ever, this time not on an equal footing, as the great tailor saw all his customers return to him, whilst poor Tom waited in vain for the return of his. The inscription : "Information, discretion, despatch" brought in nothing, or almost nothing ; and the mysterious general no longer called for his secret commission at the Agency. Anybody but Levis would have drawn in his horns, but that devil of a fellow had invincible habits of spending—something in his hands which prevented them from shutting. And, besides, the Sprichts were there lugubrious since the *débaclé*, proclaiming the end of the world as near ; and they had built at the bottom of their park a reduced copy of the ruins of the Hotel de Ville, with its crumbled walls blackened by fire. On Sunday nights it was lit up with Bengal fire, and all the Sprichts mourned around it. It was ominous. J Tom Levis, on the contrary, grown Republican from hatred of his rival, celebrated regenerate France, organised jousts, regattas, crowned rosieres, and, at one of the coronations, in a luxurious expansion of joy, one summer's night, at concert hour, carried off the band of the Champs Elysees, which came to Courbevoie in his yacht, sails flying and music resounding on the water.

Debts accumulated rapidly at that rate, but the English man hardly worried about it. No one understood better than he how to baffle creditors by aplomb and impudent haughtiness. No one—not even the clerks in his Agency, well trained though they were, had his manner of curiously examining bills as though they were palimpsests, of tossing them into a drawer with a superior air ; no one had his dodges for not paying, for gaining time. Time ! that was what Tom Levis counted on to discover at last some profitable operation, what he called a great stroke. But in vain he took his hansom feverishly roamed about Paris, with sharpened eyes, greedy teeth, on the scent and lookout for his prey. The years went by, and the great stroke did not come.

One afternoon, when the Agency was swarming with people, a tall young man, of languid and haughty mien, a cynical eye, a thin moustache on the puffy paleness of a good-looking face, approached the principal wicket, and asked to speak to Tom Levis. The employee, deceived by the emptiness of the demand, took him for a creditor, and was ready assuming his most contemptuous manner, when the young man, in a sharp voice, with a nasal tone, doubled the pertinence, told the "wretched fool" that he was to inform his master at once that the King of Illyria wanted to speak to him. "Ah, monseigneur—monseigneur—" The cosmopolitan crowd turned inquisitively towards the hero of Ragusa. From the open boxes dashed a swarm of clerks to escort his majesty, to usher him into the office of Tom Levis who had not yet arrived, but was expected every moment.

It was the first time Christian had appeared at the Agency, the old Duke de Rosen having up till then settled all the accounts of the little court. But to-day it was a question of intimating an affair, so delicate, that the King did not dare entrust it to the aide-de-camp—a small house to be hired for a circus-rider who had just replaced Amy Ferat, a furnished villa to be ready in twenty-four hours, with servants, stable, and certain facilities of access. One of those *tours de force* which the Levis Agency alone was able to perform.

The salon where he waited contained only two large arm-chairs in moleskin, one of those narrow, silent gas stoves whose reflector seems to throw back the fire from an adjacent room, a small table with a blue cloth, on which lay the *Almanach de l'année*. Half the room was occupied by the high grating, also draped with blue curtains, of a bureau, carefully arranged, on which was displayed, above a great open ledger, with brass-bound corners, encircled with ink erasers, sand, rulers and penwipers, a long shelf full of books of the same size—books of the Agency—their green backs lined up like Prussians on parade. The order of this small silent corner, the freshness of the things that filled it, did honour to the old cashier, absent for the moment, whose meticulous existence was spent here. Whilst the King continued to wait, stretched out in an arm-chair, his nose poked above his furs, suddenly, without movement of the glass door giving on to the shops, closed by a big Algerian hanging, down like a theatre curtain, he heard a light, quick scratching of a pen behind the grating. Somebody was seated at the bureau, and not the old

white-headed clerk for whom the niche seemed made, but the most delightful little woman that ever thumbed a ledger. At Christian's gesture of surprise she turned, enveloped him in a soft, long look, drowning a sparkle at the corner of each eye. The whole room was lit up by that look, even as it was musically charmed by an almost trembling voice that murmured :

"My husband is keeping you rather long, monseigneur."

Tom Levis her husband ? the husband of this suave being with the refined, pale profile, with the full form of a statuette of Tanagra—how did she chance to be there, alone in that cage, thumbing those big books, whose whiteness was reflected in her pale complexion, whose pages her little fingers had difficulty in turning ! and this on one of those beautiful sunshiny February days, which lights up the lovely grace, the dresses, the smiles of the women walking along the boulevards.

Going up to her, he paid her some compliment in which these various impressions were mingled, but he could hardly speak for the beating of his heart, seized by one of those sudden and unbridled desires, such as he did not remember to have had before, spoilt and *blase* as he was. The fact was, the type of this woman, between twenty-five and thirty, was absolutely new to him, as far removed from little Colette de Rosen's rebellious curls, from the brazen impudence, the painted shameless eyes of Ferat, as it was from the embarrassing and nobly sad majesty of the Queen—neither coquetry, nor boldness, nor proud reserve, nothing that he had met with in society or in his relations with the *demi-monde*. This pretty woman, with her quiet, domestic appearance, her beautiful dark hair, smooth as that of women who dress it in the morning for the rest of the day, who, clad in a plain violet woollen dress, might but for two huge diamonds in her pink ears, have been taken for an ordinary female accountant, suddenly appeared to him in her busy imprisonment behind the wicket, like a Carmelite nun seen through the iron grating of a cloister, or an Eastern slave beseeching help through the gilded trellis of her terrace. And indeed she had the submissive bewilderment, the bent profile of a slave ; and the amber shade at the roots of her hair, the straight line of her eyebrows, her half-opened lips, gave an Asiatic appearance to this Parisian. Christian, who was standing opposite to her, called to mind the bald forehead, the monkeyish characteristics of her husband. How was it she

was in the power of such a clown? Was it not a robbery, a flagrant injustice?

However, the soft voice went on slowly in excuses:

"I'm sorry—Tom is late—if your Majesty would tell me what you want I might perhaps——"

He blushed in some embarrassment. He would never have dared to tell this candid, obliging person the rather dubious establishment he was meditating.

She then insisted, with a smile:

"Oh, your Majesty may be easy, it's I who keep the Agency books"

And you could see she had authority in the house, for at every moment some clerk would come to the little casement opening from the private room into the shop, and ask in a whisper for the most heteroclite information. "They're asking for Madame Karitide's piano; the person from the Hotel de Bristol is there"—she seemed to know everything, answered by a word, by a number, and the King, much bewildered, asked himself whether this shopangel, this ethereal being, really knew about the Englishman's underhand dealings.

"No, madame, the business which brings me here is not urgent, or at least it is so no longer—my ideas have changed since an hour ago."

He leant towards the grating as he stammered these words, then, suddenly paused, regretting his rashness, as he beholds the woman's calm activity, her long eyelashes almost brushing the paper, while her pen moves firmly on. Oh! how he longed to drag her from her prison, to carry her off in his arms, far, far away, to whisper in her ears those soothing, loving words with which little children are calmed,

The temptation becomes so strong that he is obliged to flee, to take leave abruptly, without having seen J. Tom Levis.

Night was coming, foggy and cold: the King, usually so chilly, did not notice it, sent away his carriage, and went on foot to the Grand Club, through the wide streets leading from the Madeleine to the Place Vendome. So enthusiastic, so delighted was he, that he spoke out loud to himself, his hair coming down over his eyes, before which flames seemed to dance. How many of these exuberant joys do we not pass through in the streets, and feel as if they left us some of their phosphorescence?

The King reached his club in that happy state, and did

not observe the gloomy appearance of the long line of reception-rooms, which were filled with the melancholy of the uncertain, unoccupied twilight hour, more dispiriting still in such half-public resorts, where the intimacy of home is wanting. The lamps were being brought in, a slow, dull game of billiards was proceeding at the other end; there was a rustling of newspapers, and the heavy breathing of a sleeper stretched out on the big drawing-room sofa, whom the King disturbed by his entry. He turned with a yawn which showed his broken teeth, and extended his lean arms as he mournfully queried :

"Are you going to have a spree to-night?"

Christian uttered a cry of pleasure :

"Ah, prince, I was looking for you."

Prince d'Axel, more familiarly Queue-de-Paule, evidently knew better than Rigolo all the secrets of Parisian life.

During all the ten years the prince had spent in every corner of the boulevards he knew them from end to end, from the steps of Tortoni to the gutter, and would doubtless be able to give him the information he required. Knowing well the only way of making his Highness speak, of loosening his dull, heavy brain, which French wines, though he drank them in large quantities, had never successfully stirred up, any more than the fermentation of a vintage can inflate and despatch aloft like a balloon the great ironbound barrel that contains it, Christian quickly asked for a pack of cards. Even as Moliere's heroine's are only witty fan in hand, D'Axel only became a little lively when handling the "pasteboard."

The fallen Majesty and the Crown Prince in disgrace, the two celebrities of the club, then began the game of Chinese bezique before dinner, the most "swell" game in the world, because it does not tire the head, and enables the clumsiest player to lose a fortune without the least effort.

"Tom Levis is married then?" asked Christian carelessly as he cut the cards.

The other looked at him with his dull red-rimmed eyes.

"Didn't know?"

"No. Who is the woman?"

"Sephora Leemans—celebrity."

The King trembled at the name of Sephora.

"She is a Jewess?"

"Probably."

There was a moment's silence. And, indeed, the im-

pression made by Sephora must have been very deep—her smooth oval face, her bright eyes, her sleek air must have been very fascinating—to conquer the prejudice, to remain in the memory of this Catholic Slav, haunted since his childhood's days by the robberies, the accursed witchcraft of the Bohemian Jews in the country. He went on with his questions. Unfortunately the prince was losing and absorbed in play grumbled in his long yellow beard :

"Ah, but I'm bored—I'm bored."

It was impossible to get anything else out of him.

"Good ! there's Wattelet. Come here Wattelet" said the King to a big fellow, who had just entered, lively and noisy as a big puppy.

This Wattelet, the favourite painter of the Grand Club, and of society generally, rather good-looking at a distance, but on closer inspection bearing the visible signs of a fast life, represented the modern artist, who so little resembles the flamboyant tradition of 1830. Fashionably dressed and groomed, a frequenter of *salons* and green rooms, he had nothing of the student except a certain swing and suppleness his man of the world's costume, and in his mind, as in his under language, the same elegant looseness, and an indifferent and cynical wrinkle at the mouth. Visiting the club one day to decorate the dining-room, he had made himself so agreeable, so indispensable to all the members, that he had become one of the establishment, the organiser for life of the rather monotonous parties and *fetes* of the place, bringing to bear on those pleasures the freshness of a picturesque imagination, and an education acquired in all kinds of society.

"My dear Wattelet ! my little Wattelet !"

They couldn't do without him. He was the intimate of all the members of the club, their wives, their mistresses. He would draw on one side of a card the costume of the Duchess de V—for the next Embassy ball, and on the other side the bizarre skirt over the flesh-coloured tights of Mademoiselle Alzire, the duke's little pet.

On Thursday his studio was open to all his noble clients, who enjoyed the freedom, the unceremonious and fantastic gossip of the house, the butterfly—blend of soft colours coming from the tapestries, the curiosities, the lacquered furniture, and the artist's canvases, a kind of painting which resembled himself—elegant, but a trifle vulgar—portraits of women, generally executed with an insight into Parisian trickery.

disguised complexions, wild heads of hair—a kind of art that inspired Spricht to say, with the disdainful condescension of the *parvenu* tradesman for the painter who is getting on :

"Only this little fellow knows how to paint the women I dress."

At the King's first word Wattelet began to laugh.

"But, monseigneur, that is little Sephora."

"You know her ?"

"Intimately."

"Tell me then."

And while the game went on between the two grands seigneurs the painter, sitting astride a chair, and full of pride at his intimacy with them, posed, coughed, and, assuming the voice of the showman explaining the picture in his booth, he began :

"Sephora Leemans, born in Paris in 1845-6 or 7, in a curiosity shop in the Rue Eginhard, in the Marais—a dirty, little, mouldy alley, between the Passage Charlemagne and the Church of St. Paul, Jewry. Some day, returning from Saint-Mande, your Majesty should get your coachman to go by that labyrinth of streets. You would see an amazing Paris—such houses—such heads—a jargon of Alsatian and Hebrew ; shops, dens full of waste, with old clothes and rags piled up before each door, old women with hooked noses sorting them or stripping old umbrellas ; and dogs, vermin, smells, a regular mediæval ghetto, swarming with houses of the period, iron balconies, high windows. Still, father Leemans is not a Jew. He is a Belgian from Ghent, a Catholic, and the girl, though she may be called Sephora, is a half Jewess, with the complexion, the eyes of the race, but not its hook nose ; on the contrary, the prettiest little straight nose. I don't know where she has got it from. Father Leemans has an awful snout, my first medal at the *Salon*—that snout—my goodness, yes, the old fellow shows in a corner of the vile hovel, in the Rue Eginhard, which he calls his shop, his full-length portrait signed Wattelet, and not one of my worst either—a way I had discovered of insinuating myself into the place and paying court to Sephora, for whom I had one of those fancies.

"She was fifteen then, and her youthful calm beauty was well shown up by the surrounding antiquities ; and so intelligent, so clever at selling, with a surety of eye as good as her father's about the true value of a curio.

"Ah ! the amateurs would come to the shop for the pleasure of touching her fingers, the wavy silk of her hair, while bending over the same glass case. The mother, never troublesome, an old woman, so black round the eyes that she had the air of wearing spectacles, always darning, her nose buried in some guipure, or old pieces of tapestry, not bothering about her daughter, and how right she was. Sephora was a serious character, whom nothing could lead astray from her path."

"Really ?" said the King, who seemed enchanted.

"Your Majesty may judge by this, Mother Leemans slept at the shop ; the daughter returned about ten to her father that he might not be alone. Well, this wonderful creature, whose beauty was celebrated, sung in all the papers, who could, with a mere nod of the head, have made Cinderella's coach rise up from the ground before her, waited every night for the Madeleine omnibus and returned straight to the nest of the paternal owl.

"In the morning, as the omnibuses had not yet started at the hour of her departure, she would go on foot in all weather, her black dress under a waterproof, and I swear to you that in all the crowd of shopgirls who come down the Rue de Rivoli-Saint-Antoine, in hood, hat, or bare-headed, sulky, pale, or smiling, fresh little throats coughing at the fog, always with some gallant at their heels, not one could have held a candle to her."

"What time does she start ?" grunted the royal prince, very wide awake.

But Christian grew impatient.

"Let him finish—and then ?"

"Then, monseigneur, I succeeded in introducing myself into my angel's house, and I pushed my point quite gently. On Sundays they organised small family parties for loto, with some curiomongers of the Passage Charlemagne—delightful society, I always came back with fleas. But I sat beside Sephora, trod on her toes under the table while she gazed at me with such frank, angelic eyes that I was firmly convinced of her ignorance, purity, and virtue.

"Then came a day when, visiting their hovel in the Rue Eginhard, I found the whole place upside down, the mother crying, the father furious, cleaning an old musket with which he swore he would take revenge on the accursed seducer. The girl had just run away with Baron Sala, one of old Leeman's wealthiest clients, and the old man, I afterwards learnt, had

himself sold his daughter, like any valuable old ironwork, Sephora hid herself and her septuagenarian lover in Switzerland, Scotland, by the side of their blue lakes, for two or three years. Then suddenly I heard she had returned and started a family hotel at one end of the Avenue d'Antin.

"I hastened there. I found her just as lovable and serene as ever, presiding over the most promiscuous *table d'hôte*, garnished with Brazilians, English.

"One half of the guests were still eating salad, whilst the others were already turning back the tablecloth to play baccarat. There she got to know J. Tom Levis, not handsome, not even young then, and without a penny. "What did he do to her?"—a mystery. What is certain is, she sold her place for him, married him, helped him to set up the Agency, at first prosperous, now declining, so that Sephora, whom no one ever saw, who lived as a recluse in the queer abode Tom Levis had run up, made only a few months ago a new appearance in the world in the shape of the most delightful book-keeper. Heavens! the effect on the customers! The flower of the clubs begins to meet in the Rue Royale. They flirt at the wicket of the cashier's office, as formerly in the old curiosity shop or her room in the family hotel. As for me, I'm no longer in it. That woman is a terror to me. Always the same, since ten years, without a fold, without a wrinkle, with her long eyelashes cast down, her eyes always young, and full, and all that for the grotesque husband she adores! It's enough to discourage the worst smitten."

The King shuffled the cards in irritation.

"Come, now, is it possible? A wretched monkey like Tom Levis! bald—fifteen years older than she—a low pickpocket?"

"There are some who like it, monseigneur."

And the Crown Prince, with his drawling vulgar accent commented:

"Nothing to be done with that woman, all the signals against one—line blocked."

"By George! you, D' Axel, we know your way of signalling," said Christian, when he had understood the expression transferred from the slang of the mechanics to that of the big "swells." "You've no patience; you want open doors. But I swear that for a man who would give himself the trouble to get a little gone on Sephora, who would not be fobbed off

by silence, or disdain, it would be a business of only a month—not more.”

“Bet you won’t,” said D’Axel.

“How much?”

“Two thousand louis.”

“I take you. Wattelet, ask for the book.”

This book, in which the bets of the Grand Club were entered, was as curious and instructive in its way as those in Levis’s den. The greatest names of the French aristocracy were here found, connected with the absurdest, foolishest, impossiblest bets—that, for instance, of the Duke Courson-Launay, who bet and lost every hair of his body, so that he could not go out for a fortnight. Several inventions were still more extravagant, and the signatures inscribed on a hundred glorious deeds were to be found coupled in this record of folly.

Around the two parties to the bet several members of the club were grouped in respectful curiosity. This ridiculous, cynical wager, excusable perchance amid the laughter and intoxication of a number of foolish youths, appeared different when sanctioned by the gravity of baldheads, the social ranks, they represented, and the importance of the signatures to be affixed, and the onlooker might have been persuaded he was assisting at the conclusion of an international treaty affecting the destinies of Europe.

Thus it was recorded: *This 3rd February 1875, H. M. Christian IX. wagers with H. R. H. Prince d’ Axel two thousand napoleons he gains the favour of Sephora L. before the end of the present month.*

“This, perhaps, would have been the true occasion for the signatures ‘Rigolo,’ and ‘Queue-de- Poule,” said Wattelet to himself, as he carried the book away, the shadow of a malicious laugh crossing his society-clown face.

Chapter Six

THE BOHEMIA OF EXILE

YES, yes! we know that. Oh yes. Goddam! Shocking. It’s only when you don’t want to pay or answer that you use such coin. But that won’t wash any more. Let’s settle accounts, you old scamp.

“Really, M. Lebeau, you jump on me with a vehemence.”

And to utter the word “vehemence,” which he seems proud to include in his vocabulary, as he repeats it three or

four times, J. Tom Levis throws himself back and appears to vanish within the big white tie of old-fashioned, clerical type that clings round his neck. At the same time his shifty eyes turn about, masking his inscrutable thoughts, whilst his opponent's glance cowers under his lowered eyelids and answers the Englishman's rascally talk by the vulgar cunning visible on his narrow, weasel-like countenance. With his thin, curled hair, his austere black coat, the correctness of his appearance, Maitre Lebeau has something of the look of a prosecutor at the old *chatelet*; but as there is nothing like argument, the anger created by interests in danger, to reveal a man's true character, so at this moment it happens that the elegant Lebeau, the oily, gentlemanlike person, polished, like his own finger nails, the favourite of royal anterooms, the former footman of the Tuileries, shows himself the miserable lackey he really is, greedy for game and prey.

To shelter themselves from a spring shower which was thoroughly cleansing the flags of the courtyard, the two "pals" had taken refuge in the big coach-house, with whitened walls freshly done over and covered with thick matting half way up, which protected from the damp the many magnificent carriages standing there, wheel to wheel—from the gala coaches, all glass and gilding, to the comfortable four-in-hands used for sporting lunches, to the ordinary light phaeton, to the sledge that the Queen drove over the ice and snow when there was a frost—each recalling, in the repose and twilight of the coach-house, the splendid horses that carry them forth, briskly or majestically, according to occasion. What completed the impression of comfort, of luxurious idleness, was the neighbourhood of the stables, from which arose a noise of snorting, loud kicking against the woodwork, and the open saddle-room, showing a waxed floor, the whips in the racks, the harness and saddles on their blocks, around the walls bridles and bits gleaming with steel.

Tom and Lebeau discussed in a corner, and their voices, raised in argument, mingled with the rain falling on the asphalt paving. The valet especially, finding himself at home, talked very loudly. Could anyone understand that robber of a Levis? And who would have suspected him of such a trick? When their Majesties left the Hotel des Pyramides for Saint-Mande who arranged the whole thing? Was it Lebeau, yes or no? And that in spite of everybody, in spite of the most pronounced hostility. What was the arrangement in return? Were they not

to share all the commissions, the tradesmen's tips? Well, was it so?

"Oh yes, it was so."

"Then why this trickery?"

"No—no, never cheat," said J. Tom Levis, his hand on his shirt front.

"Come, now, you old humbug. All the trades-people have given you forty per cent. I have the proofs. And you said you had only ten. So, on the million that the Saint-Mande establishment cost, I have five per cent. for myself—that is fifty thousand francs—and you thirty-five per cent.—that is, seven times fifty thousand francs—that is, three hundred and fifty thousand francs; three hundred and fifty thousand francs, three hundred and fifty thousand.

He was suffocating with rage, this amount of money sticking in his throat like a fish-bone. Tom tried to soothe him down. Firstly, it was all greatly exaggerated—and besides the agent had had huge expenses—the rent of his house in the Rue Royal was increased—so much money had been paid out, and so little had come in—without considering that for him it was only a momentary affair, could only happen once, while Lebeau was there always, and in a house in which the expenses were over twenty thousand francs a year opportunities could not be wanting.

But the valet would not take this view. His own affairs concerned nobody, and certainly he was not going to be plundered by a dirty Englishman.

"Monsior Lebeau, you're impertinent. I sha'n't talk with you any more."

And Tom Levis began to move to the door. But the other barred the way.

"Go without paying! Ah, no!"

His lips were pale. His weasel-face, distorted with fury, touched the Englishman, who was still very calm, and so irritatingly cool that the valet atlast, losing in head entirely, shook his fist at him, with a coarse insult. With a back hand blow, quick as a sword parry, the Englishman knocked down his fist, and in the finest accent of the Faubourg Antoine:

"None of that, old man—or I'll go for you," he said.

The effect of those few words was prodigious. Lebeau, amazed, looked about him mechanically to see if it could really have been the Englishman who spoke, then, his glance falling on Tom Levis, suddenly grown very red and his eyes rolling,

he was seized with a fit of wild merriment, in which his recent wrath vibrated, and which at last overcame the agent himself.

"Oh! you d——d humbug! d——d humbug! I ought to have suspected you. No Englishman could be so fearfully English as you are.

They were still laughing, without having regained breath, when all at once the door in the harness-room opened, and the Queen appeared. She had stopped a few moments before in the neighbouring stable, in which she had fastened up her favourite mare, and she had heard every word of the conversation. The treason, being of so low a source, hardly moved her at all. She had long had her own opinion of Lebeau, the hypocritical valet, witness of all her humiliations, all her wretchedness; the other, the man of the hansom, she hardly knew, a more tradesman. From those, however, she now learnt important things. So the establishment of Saint-Mande cost a million; the life they thought so careful, so modest, cost two hundred thousand francs a year, and they had hardly forty thousand. How could she have been so long blind to the fact that their means were insufficient? Who then provided the funds for all these expenses? Who paid for them—for all this luxury, this house, those houses, carriages, even her dress, her private charities? Shame at the thought burned her cheeks as she went across the courtyard in the rain and quickly went up the small flight of steps to the steward's room.

Rosen, occupied in arranging bills on which were piles of gold, started up in astonishment at seeing her.

"No—remain seated," she said abruptly; and bending over the writing table, she put her hand, still gloved, on it, determined, pressing authoritative:

"Rosen, on what have we been living for two years? Oh, no circumlocution! I know all I thought merely hired is bought in our name and paid for. I know Saint-Mande alone cost us more than a million, the million we brought from Illyria. You must tell me who has helped us since then, and from whom we are receiving alms."

The old man's dismayed face, the quiver of his thousand little wrinkles, revealed the truth to Frederique.

"You! It's you!"

She would never have thought it and whilst he excused himself, stammering out the words, "duty—gratitude—gratitude—restiitition."

"Duke," she said vehemently, "the King does not take

back what he has once given, and the Queen is not to be kept like a ballet dancer."

Tears shone in her eyes, tears of pride that did not fall.

"Oh! pardon, pardon."

He was so humble, and kissed her finger tips with such an expression of sorrow that she was somewhat softened.

"My dear Rosen you will draw up an account of your advances. A receipt shall be given you, and the King shall pay it as soon as possible. As for further expenses, I intend to look after them. I will take care they do not go beyond our income. We will sell horses and carriages. The establishment must be kept down. Exiled princes must be content with little.

The old duke started

"Do not deceive yourself, madam, it is especially in exile that royalty requires all its prestige. Ah! if I had been hearkened to, it is not here, in a distant suburb, with an establishment only suitable for a stay at some watering place, that your Majesties would have come to live. I would have installed you in a place, in the full flow of Parisian life, believing that what deposed monarchs have most to be afraid of is the indifference which steals over them when they have become acquainted with the levelling familiarity, the hustling of the streets. I have, I know, been often considered absurd in my points of etiquette, my childish, superannuated clinging to them. And yet those forms are more important than ever, they help to support the pride of demeanour which so easily disappears in misfortune. It is the unyielding armour that keeps the soldier erect even when he is wounded to death."

For a moment she remained without answering, her open forehead crossed by an idea which had just come to her. Then she raised her head and said:

"It's impossible; there's a dignity worth more than this. After this evening I intend things shall be changed as I have now determined."

He thereupon became more insistent, almost beseeching.

"But your Majesty does not reflect. A sale of horses, carriages, a sort of royal bankruptcy, what a stir it would make, what a scandal!"

"What is happening now is even more scandalous."

"Who knows it? Who even suspects it? How should anybody think that Rosen, the old miser—you hesitated yourself about believing it just now. Oh, madame, madame,

I entreat you to accept what you are pleased to call my devotion. First of all, it would be attempting the impossible. I only knew — your income for the whole year would hardly provide the king with enough to pay his gambling debts."

"The King shall play no more, duke."

It was said in such a voice, with such a look, Rosen did not venture to insist any longer. Still, he allowed himself to add one more observation :

"I will do as your Majesty demands. But I beg you to remember that in an emergency I have at least deserved to be the first person to be consulted."

He was quite certain the application must be made before long.

The promised reforms began next day. Half the servants got notice, the useless carriages were sent to Tattersall's, where they were sold at fair prices, barring the gala coaches, too startling and showy to suit private people. However, they were got rid of, thanks to an American circus which had just started in Paris, and the the splendid vehicles, built by Rosen's orders, to preserve about his princes some of their vanished pomp, in the hope of a return to Leybach, served to exhibit the fascinations of Chinese dwarfs and learned monkeys. Towards the end of the representations, on the disordered sand of the arena, those princely carriages, the coats-of-arms hardly blotted out from their panels, would be exhibited making the round of the circus to the orchestra's bewitching tunes, while some grotesque, grinning figure bent out of the half lifted windows, or the brutal, close-clipped head and massive shoulders clad in pink silk tights, of some renowned gymnast, bowing his head shining with pomatum and perspiration. What an augury for royalty !

This sale at Tattersall's occurring when that of the Queen of Galicia's diamonds at the Hotel Drouot, was still advertised on every wall, the two posters hanging side by side made some noise. But Paris does not stick long at any one subject, ideas are as evanescent as the ephemeral sheets of the newspapers. The two sales were talked about for a day, next day nobody thought about them. Christian II. accepted the reforms resolved on by the Queen without any expostulation. Since his last shocking escapade, he seemed almost bewildered in her presence, with the humble air of a rebuked child, and emphasising the childishness that was the excuse for all his folly. And, after all, what did the reforms in the establish-

ment concern him? Given up to debauchery and pleasure, his life was spent elsewhere. Strange to say, he did not once have recourse to Rosen's purse during six months. This raised his dignity somewhat in the Queen's eyes, and it was also a relief not to see the English agent's fantastic hansom waiting continually in a corner of the courtyard, no longer to confront the obsequious smile of this courtier-like creditor on the staircase.

And still the King spent a great deal, and indulged in all kinds of amusements more extravagantly than ever. Where did he get the money from? Elysee became acquainted with it, in the most curious way, through old Uncle Sauvadon, the worthy man, whose instruction about "opinions on things" he had once undertaken, the only one of his old acquaintances he still visited since he had joined the household in the Rue Herbillon. He occasionally lunched with him at Bercy, brought him news of Colette, whom the old fellow complained he never saw. Colette was his adopted child, the daughter of a well-beloved, impecunious brother, whom he had supported till his death. Always taking the greatest interest in her, he had paid for her nurses, her christening dress, and letter for her upbringing in the most fashionable Paris convent. She was his single vice, the embodiment of his vanity, the beautiful doll on which he concentrated all his ambitions, and when, in the parlour of the Sacre-Cœur, the little Sauvadon whispered to her uncle: "That girl's mother is a baroness, or duchess, or marchioness," the millionaire uncle answered, with a shrug of his broad shoulders: "Well do something better than that for you." He made her, indeed, a princess at eighteen. Princes on the lookout for fortunes are not uncommon in Paris; the Levis Agency has quite a large assortment ready; all that has to be done is to settle the figures. And Sauvadon did not consider two millions too much to pay for the privilege of appearing in a corner of the *salon* on the young Princess de Rosen's reception nights, for the right of cheering her guests with the broad smile that turned up the corners of his mouth, and made it resemble the rim of a porringer between his short, bristly whiskers.

At first he mistrusted himself, hardly spoke, surprised, frightened people by his dumbness. It is not in a warehouse at Bercy, in the traffic of southern wines, that anyone can learn to speak well. Then, thanks to Meraut, he acquired a few ready-made ideas, a few bold aphorisms on the events

of the day, the last new novel. The uncle spoke, and did not stultify himself too much; and the guests were dumfounded when the white-waistcoated, clumsy fellow picturesquely set forth certain theories in the manner of De Maistre. But one day the sovereigns of Illyria robbed him of his provider of ideas and the means of displaying them. Collette, bound by her duties as a dame of honour, no longer left Saint-Mande, and Sauvadon knew too well the chief of the civil and military department to expect admittance there. He had not even spoken of it. Fancy the duke bringing him, presenting him to the proud Frederique!—a Bercy wine merchant! And not a retired merchant, but, on the contrary, in full activity; for, in spite of his millions, his niece's entreaties, Sauvadon still worked, spent his time at the warehouse, on the quay, a pen behind his ear, his hair ruffled, amid carters and sailors disembarking and piling up barrels; or else under the big trees of the park, now mutilated and cup up in innumerable casks, representing row upon row of his riches. "If I stopped I should die," he would say. And indeed he lived on the noise of rolling casks, the intoxicating smell of small wine rising up from those great store in the damp cellars, where he had begun life forty-five years since as a jou neyman cooper.

Here it was Elysee came now and then to see his former pupil and enjoy one of those lunches only to be had at Bercy, under the trees of the park or the arched roof of a cellar, the wine just drawn, the fish quivering fresh from the pond, and local recipes for cooking them *en matelotes*, just as in the interior of Languedoc or the Vosges. It was no longer now a question of ideas on current topics, since he no longer went to *soirees* at Colette's; but the good man liked to hear Meraut speak, to see him eat and drink freely, because he could not forget the garret in the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and treated Elysee as if he had made a shipwreck of life—a touching delicacy for a man who had known hunger towards one he knew to be poor. Meraut told him about his niece, her life at Saint-Mande, brought him a reflection of the grandeur which cost the brave man so dear, and which he would never witness. Doubtless he was proud to think of the young lady-in-waiting dining with king and queen, moving in a court ceremony; but the disappointment at not seeing her increased his bad temper, his rancour against old Rosen.

"What is he to be so haughty?"

Why, I bought them with my money. His crosses, his medals, his stars? Eh! I shall have them when I want them. Indeed, my dear Meraut, you don't know. Since I saw you I've had some good luck."

"What is it, uncle?"

He called him "uncle" with an affectionate southern familiarity, the desire to give shape to the particular sympathy—without any intellectual bond—he felt for the big merchant.

"My dear chap, I've got the Lion of Illyria—the commander's cross. The duke, who's so proud, with his grand cordon! On New Year's Day, when I pay my call, I'll put it on—it'll teach him."

Elysee could not believe it. The order of the Lion!—one of the oldest, most sought after in Europe—given to Uncle Sauvadon, to "my uncle." Why? For having sold doctored wine at Bercy?

"Oh, it's very simple," said the other. "I paid for the grade of commander as I paid for the title of prince. For a little more I should have had the order of the grand cordon—it was also on sale."

"Where?" asked Elysee, paling.

"Why, at the Levis Agency, Rue Royale. You can get everything at that d——d Englishman's. My cross cost ten thousand francs—the cordon was valued at fifteen thousand, and I know the man who has bought it. Guess whom? Biscarat, the big hairdresser, Biscarat of the Boulevard des Capucines. But, my dear sir, what I tell you is known all over Paris. Go to Biscarat; you will find at the end of the lagre hall, where he officiates among his thirty assistants, a huge photograph of him as 'Figaro,' razor in hand, with the broad ribbon of the order across his chest. The design is copied in miniature on all the bottles in the shop. If the general saw it his moustache would fly up to his nose, I should think, eh? You know, when he——"

He tried to take off the genral's grimace, but, as he had no moustache, it was not a bit like it.

"You've got your patent, uncle? Will you show it me?"

Elysee still hoped that there was some forgery, some fraud, in which the Levis Agency dealt unscrupulously. No! It seemed in order, drawn up according to formula, sealed with the Illyrian arms, and the signatures of Boscovich and King Christian II. Doubt was out of the question. A trade

in crosses and cordons was being carried on with the King's permission; besides, to complete his conviction, Meraut had only to visit the councillor on his return to Saint-Mande.

In a corner of the immense hall which occupied the whole top floor of the house and served as a workroom to Christians who never worked—as *salle d'armes* gymnasium, library, he found Boscovich among his drawers, big envelopes of brownish paper, sheets laid one over the other, in which the latest gathered plants were drying. During his exile the *savant* had begun a collection in the woods of Vincennes and Boulogne, which contain the richest flora in France. He had, moreover, bought the herbarium of a famous botanist, just dead; and, lost in the inspection of his new wealth, he bent over magnifying glass raised cautiously, one by one, the heavy papers, between which appeared flattened plants. He uttered a cry of joy, of admiration, when the specimen was intact, well-preserved, considered it a long time with moist lips, reading aloud its Latin name, its label. At other times a cry of anger escaped him, when he observed the flower to be attacked, perforated by that imperceptible worm well known to botanists, an atom born of the dust of plants and living on it, which is the danger, often the destruction, of collections. The stem still held, but as soon as the page was shaken the whole thing fell down, fluttered away—flowers roots, in a fra-
whirlwind.

"It's the worm—it's the worm," said Boscovich, looking through the magnifying glass; and with an air expressing sorrow and pride, he pointed to a small hole similar to that of the worm in the wood, showing the course taken by the monster. Elysee could not suspect him. The poor imbecile was incapable of scoundrelism, but also of the slightest resistance. As soon as decorations were spoken of he began to tremble and look askance over his glass, suspicious and nervous. What was it? The King had certainly commanded him of late to prepare a number of patents of all grades, with a blank for the name, but he knew nothing, had never permitted himself to put a question.

"Well, monsieur," remarked Elysee seriously, "it is proper to warn you, as councillor, that the King is trafficking in decorations with the Levis Agency."

He then told him the story of the Gascon barber, at which all Paris was just then laughing. Boscovich uttered one of his little feminine cries, but was not really much scandalised;

anything that was not connected with his mania had little interest for him.

But it's unworthy—a man like you—to lend a hand to such hideous jobberies !”

And the other, desperate at having his eyes forcibly opened to what he did not want to see :

“*Ma che ! Ma che !* What can I do, my dear Monsieur Meraut ? The King's the King. When he says : ‘Boscovich write that’ my hand obeys without thinking ; especially as his Majesty is so kind to me, so generous. It was he who, seeing me desperate at the loss of my herbarium, made me a present of this one—fifteen hundred francs, a splendid opportunity ; and I got, besides, the first edition of Linnæus's ‘*Hortus Cliffortianus*.’ ”

Naively, cynically, the poor devil laid bare his conscience. All was dried and dead, herbarium colour. The mania, cruel as the naturalist's imperceptible worm, had perforated, gnawed through it all. He was only stirred when Elysee threatened to tell the Queen. Then only did the lunatic leave go of his glass, and in a low voice, with the deep sighs of a penitent confessing, owned up. Many things went on under his eyes, which he could not prevent, which grieved him. The King kept bad company. *E poi che volete ?* He had no vocation for reigning ; had no instinct for the throne. He had never had it. “For instance, I remember—a long time ago—in the late Leopold's lifetime, when the King had his first attack as he left the table, when Christian was informed that he was certainly about to succeed his uncle, the child—he was hardly twelve, and played croquet in the *patio* of the palace—the child began to cry, to cry—a regular nerve attack. He said : ‘I don't want to be King ; I don't want to be King. Put my cousin Stanislas in my place.’ I have often remembered, on seeing it again in the eyes of Christian II., his frightened, glazed expression that morning, clinging with all his strength to his mallet, as if he were afraid he would be carried off to the throne-room, and crying : ‘I don't want to be King !’ ”

The whole of Christian's character was explained in that anecdote. Doubtless he was not a bad man, but a child-man, married too young, full of strong passions, inherited viciousness. The life he led, the nights at the club, the loose women, the suppers, are in a certain world a husband's normal characteristics. The whole was aggravated by the role of king which he did not know how to maintain, by responsibilities

beyond his powers, and particularly by that exile which was slowly demoralising him. Firmer natures than his are unable to resist the disorder of broken habits, the renewed uncertainties, with the wild hopes, the anguishes, the enervation of waiting. Like the sea, exile has its narcotising effect; it depresses and dulls. It is a phase of transition. The *ennui* of long voyages can only be escaped by fixed occupations or regular hours of study. But with what can a king busy himself who has no longer a people, ministers, or council, nothing to decide, to sign, too much brains or scepticism to amuse himself with the semblance of such things, too great ignorance to try any diversion of steady work? Exile then resembles shipwreck, casting privileged passengers overboard with the steerage. A genuinely proud spirit, a true royal character is necessary to escape the results of the familiar, degrading promiscuousness which may afterwards give rise to shame, to remain a king among the privations, the misery that reduces all ranks to a common suffering humanity.

Alas! that exile of Bohemia, from which the Duke de Rosen had saved the house of Illyria so long, at such sacrifice, began at last to invade it. The King had tried all kinds of ways of paying the cost of his continual round of pleasure. He began by floating bills, finding it, with Tom Levis's aid, just as simple as, even easier than those "drafts on our treasury" he once used to address to the chief of the civil and military department. The bills came due, were increased by a number of renewals, until at last Tom Levis, finding himself short of cash, invented the traffic in patents. The poor Lion of Illyria, cut up, like any ordinary animal for the butcher, was carved into quarters and slices, sold at the stall and by auction at so much the mane and the sirloin, the rib, and the claws. And that was only the beginning. In Tom Levis's hansom, the King was not going to stop on so fine a road, said Meraut to himself as he left Boscovich. He perceived clearly no reliance could be placed in the councillor, easy to get round, like most people with a fad. He himself had entered the household too recently to have any influence on Christian. Should he go to old Rosen? At the tutor's first words, however, the duke darted at him the awful look of one whose religion has been insulted. The King, degraded as he might become, was always the King to him. Nor could anything be expected from the monk, whose wild face was only seen at long intervals between his journeys, more weather beaten and thinner each time.

The Queen ? But he had seen for months past she was sad, so feverish, her fine forehead ever clouded with anxiety and when she came to the lessons she listened absently, her head drooping wearily over her work. She was full of grave preoccupation, unknown to her up till then, which touched her to the heart—worries about money, the shame of all those outstretched hands she could no longer fill—tradespeople, the necessitous, the companions of her exile and misfortune, that melancholy office of a king who has his duties when he has no longer his rights. Those who had learnt the way to the palace when it was prosperous now waited for hours in the anterooms, and, often weary of waiting, departed with bitter words, which the Queen divined, without hearing them, by their discontented movements, the weariness they showed, proving continual disappointment. She tried hard to inspire a new order into their way of life, but she had bad luck with her investment. Poor Frederique, who fancied she had gone through the whole scale of suffering, had still to learn those miseries which wither people away, the hard, brutal touch of common daily life. There were pay days every month, that kept her awake thinking at night, like any business man in difficulty. When, sometimes, the servants' wages were overpaid, she feared to read, in the slow execution of an order, in her look less humble than usual, a servant's discontent. She at last became acquainted with debt, growing gradually more and more harassing, forcing open the highest, the best gilded doors, the insolence of pursuit. The old duke, solemn and silent observed all the Queen's anxieties, hovered round her, as if to say : "I am here." She was, however, resolved to exhaust all other means before addressing herself to one whom she had punished with so haughty a rebuke.

One night they were all in the grand *salon*, and the King was absent as usual. Under the silver candelabra which began, what was called the Queen's game ; the duke opposite her Majesty, with Madame Eleonore and Boscovich for opponents. The princess played softly some of those "Echoes of Illyria," which Frederique never tired of hearing, and which, at the slightest sign of gratification, the musician changed into a war song or march. These evocations of the fatherland, calling up on the faces of the card-party a mournful or heroic expression, were the only breaks in the atmosphere of resignation to exile of assumed habits, in that rich *bourgeois salon* that beleaguered their Majesties.

Ten o' clock struck.

The Queen, instead of withdrawing, as on other evenings, giving the signal for dispersing, cast an absent look around her and observed :

"You may retire. I have some work to do with M. Meraut"

Elysee, engaged in reading by the fire, bowed, and closed the *brochure* he was reading, went into the study for pens, ink, paper.

When he returned the Queen was alone, listening to the carriages rolling down the court-yard while the big doors were shut, and the corridors and staircases of the house echoed with the sounds of coming and going which precede the hour of rest in a large household. There was at last silence, a silence increased by two miles of woods, which deadened the distant roar of Paris by the wind and rustling leaves. The deserted drawing-room, still fully lit up in that quiet solitude, seemed destined to some tragic scene. Frederique, leaning her elbow on the table, pushed away the blotting-book prepared by Meraut.

"No, no. We shall not work to night," she remarked, "it was pretext. Sit and let us talk."

Then, in a lower tone :

"I have something to ask of you".

But what she had to say probably cost her much, for she herself in for a few moments, her mouth and eyes half open, with the pained, aged look Elysee had already seen at times on her face, and which made it yet more lovely in his eyes, marked by all the devotions, all the sacrifices, hollowed in its pure lines by all the purest feelings of a Queen and a woman. He was inspired with a religious awe for her. At last taking her courage in both hands, in a low voice, timidly dropping her words one after the other, like frightened footsteps, Frederique asked if he did not know in Paris of one of those—of those places where—you could borrow on pledge.

Fancy asking that of Elysee, that out-and-out Bohemian, who knew every pawnshop in Paris, who had used them as stores during the last twenty years, where he put his winter apparel in summer and his summer apparel in winter ! If he knew the "spout !" if he knew his "uncle !" The slang of poverty, reviving in him memories of his youth, made him smile a moment. The Queen, however, went on trying to steady her voice :

"I want to entrust you something to take there : some jewels. One has difficult moments."

And her beautiful eyes, now raised, revealed a deep abyss of calm and superhuman grief.

Neraut made a sign that he was willing to do as she wished. If he had said a word he would have sobbed ; if he had made a gesture it would have been to fall at the feet of that august mistress. And yet, his admiration began to be softened by pity. The Queen appeared just then a little less lofty, a little less above the vulgarities of life, as if, in the sad confession she had just made, he had heard a passing accent of Bohemianism, something that was the beginning of the fall, and brought her nearer him.

Suddenly she got up and took from its crystal case the antique relic, which, placed on the table, glittered like a handful of of variegated jewels.

Elysee started—the crown !

"Yes, the crown ; for six hundred years it has been in the house of Illyria. Kings have died, rivers of noble blood have flowed to defend it. Now must help us to live. We have nothing left but that."

It was a magnificent diadem in fine old gold, whose arches, studded with ornament, joined above the crimson velvet cap. On the arches, on the band of wreathed filigree, in the middle of each flower that imitated the fibres of the trefoil leaf, at every point were set all varieties of known stones—the transparent blue of sapphires, the velvety blue of turquoises, the aurora of the topazes, the flame of Eastern rubies and emeralds like drops of water on leaves, the cabalistic opal, and the milky pearls ; but, surpassing them all, diamonds set all over the crown resumed in their facets those thousand shaded fires, and, like a luminous scattered dust, a cloud crossed by the sun, melted, softened the brilliance of the diadem, with the soft radiance of a lamp in the depths of a sanctuary.

The Queen placed her trembling finger here and there.

"We must prize out a few stones—the biggest."

"With what ?"

They spoke in undertones like two criminals. But seeing nothing in the drawing-room that would suit :

"Bring me a light," said Frederique.

They passed into the glass verandah, where the high lamp, held up, cast fantastic shadows, and a long trail of light had vanished on the lawns, in the night of the garden.

"No, no, not scissors," she murmured, seeing him go to her workbasket. "They're not strong enough, I've tried."

They at last discovered on the tub of a pomegranate whose delicate foliage sought the moonlight at the glass, gardener's pruning knife. Returning to the drawing-room Elysee tried to raise, with the point of the instrument, a huge oval sapphire the Queen pointed out to him, but the jewel firmly set, resisted, slipped under the iron, immovable in its grip. Besides, the hand of the operator, afraid of ruining the stone, or breaking the setting, which bore marks on its gold of former attempts, was neither strong nor sure. The Royalists suffered, was indignant at the outrage he had to commit on the crown. He felt it quiver, resist, struggle.

"I can't," he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

The Queen answered :

"It must be done."

"But it will be seen."

She smiled proudly, with irony.

"Be seen ! Who even looks at it now ? Who thinks about it ? Who cares about it here except me ?"

And whilst he went on with his task, pale, with bent head, his long hair over his eyes, the royal diadem between his knees, which the pruning knife was dismembering, Frederique, lamp on high, watched the outrage, as cold as those stones that gleamed with the scraps of gold on the tablecover, intact and splendid, in spite of their mutilation.

Next day Elysee, who had remained out all the morning, returned after the first summons to lunch, sat down at table, excited, troubled, hardly mixing in the conversation, of which he was usually the beacon light. His agitation affected the Queen, without at all altering her smile or the calmness of her contralto ; and after the meal, they were yet a long time before they could meet, were able to talk freely to each other, being hindered by the etiquette of the relations established in the house, the attendance of the dame of honour, the jealous watching of Madame de Silvis.

Lesson-time came at last, while the little prince got ready his books.

"What is the matter ?" she asked. "What new thing has happened ?"

"Ah, madame, all the stones are false."

"False !"

"And very carefully imitated in past. How did it happen ? When ? By whom ? There is a criminal in the house."

She had grown terribly pale at the word criminal. Suddenly her teeth clenched, with a rush of anger and despair in her eyes.

"It's true. There's a criminal here, and you and I know him well."

Then, with a feverish gesture, violently seizing Elysee's wrist, as if for a secret agreement :

"But we shall never denounce him, shall we ?"

"Never," he said, turning his eyes away, for they had understood each other in a word.

Chapter Seven

THE GRAND STROKE

The door, slammed sharply, automatically, blew through the Agency a breath of air, that swelled the blue veils, the mackintoshes, shook the invoices in the fingers of the employees and the little feathers in the travelling toques. Hands were extended, foreheads bowed : Tom Levis had just come in. A circular smile, two or three orders briefly given the accountant, a moment to ask with an amazingly exultant intonation if monseigneur the Prince of Wales's parcel had been despatched, and he was already in his office, whilst the clerks signalled to one another by winks their master's astonishing good-humour. Assuredly something had happened. The calm Sephora herself understood, behind her grating, and softly asked, on seeing Tom come in :

"What is it ?"

"Ah ! such things !" said he, with the wide, silent laugh, the turn of the eyes characteristic of great occasions.

He beckoned to his wife :

"Come !"

And they went down the fifteen narrow steps, bordered with copper, that led to a small, underground boudoir, tastefully furnished with a sofa, a dressing-table, lit up almost constantly by gas, the little cellar window opening on to the Rue Royale being closed by glass thick as horn. From here they could communicate with the cellars and the yards, enabling Tom to come and go unperceived, to escape intruders and creditors. With a business as complicated

as that of the Agency, these Comanche ruses are indispensable, without which life would be used up in quarrels, in disputes.

Tom's oldest clerks, people who had been employed by him five or six months, had never descended to that mysterious basement room, where Sephora alone had the right to penetrate. It was the agent's intimate corner, his actual self, his conscience, the cocoon from which he went forth each time a transformed being—something like a comedian's dressing-room, which just then it greatly resembled, with the gas illuminating the marble the flunced trimmings of the toilet table, the curious pantomimes which Tom Levis, foreign agent, was just then executing. In a second he opened his long English frock coat, flung it away, then one waistcoat, then another, the variegated waistcoats of a circus performer, unwound the ten metres of white muslin forming his cravat, the flannel bands superpoised round his waist, and from that stately and apoplectic rotundity that rushed all over Paris in the first, the only hansom known in those days, there all at once appeared, with an "ouf" of relief, a little, wizened man, no bigger than an empty reel, a dreadful quinquagenarian Paris street arab, who might have been saved from a fire, dragged from a limekiln, with the wrinkles, scars, devastating tonsures of burning, and, in spite of all, a youthful and cheeky air; the genuine Tom Levis that is to say, Narcisse Poitou, the son of a joiner in the Rue d'Orillon.

Having grown amid the shavings of the paternal establishment up to ten, from ten to fifteen educated in the street practically, that incomparable, open air school, Narcisse had soon felt in him a horror for the rabble and manual occupations, at the same time conscious of a devouring imagination, which the Parisian gutter had furnished better than a long voyage. He combined projects, affairs, as a child. Later on, his mobility of dream prevented him from concentrating his forces, from making them productive. He travelled, undertook a thousand business Aminers in Australia, a comedian in Batavia, a bailiff in Brussels, after having made debts in both worlds, left creditors at the four corners of the universe, he installed himself as business agent in London, where he lived some time. Here he might have succeeded, had it not been for his terrible insatiable imagination, the imagination of a voluptuary, constantly in advance of the coming pleasure.

It was also a fantastic caprice, united with his instincts of

in Paris, which was easy to him with his knowledge of the ways and language of the Anglo-Saxons. It came to him instinctively, suddenly, at his first grand stroke.

"Whom shall I announce?" insolently asked a tall scamp in livery.

Poitou saw himself, so threadbare, so miserable, in the vast antechamber trembling to be led out before he was listened to; felt the need of doing something abnormal and strange.

"Oh, announce Sir Tom Levis."

He at once felt so much assurance under this improvised name, in this borrowed nationality, that he amused himself in perfecting its peculiarities, its manias.

A strange thing! Of the innumerable combinations of that brain full of discoveries, that one which he had sought for least of all was the most successful. He owed to it the acquaintance of Sephora who, at that time, kept a kind of family hotel at the Champs Elysees, a coquettish, three-storeyed house, with rose curtains, a small flight of steps on the Avenue d'Antin, between wide asphalt, and livened by verdure and flowers. The mistress of the house, always dressed to the nines, presented at a ground-floor window her profile, bent over some work, or her ledger. Within was a bizarrely exotic company: clowns, bookmakers, circus-riders, horse-dealers, Anglo-American Bohemia, the worst of all the scum.

The feminine *personnel* was recruited among the quadrilles at Mabilles, whose violins were heard on summer evenings, blended with the noise of family disputes, the clink of counters and louis, for play ran high after dinner. If sometimes some foreign family, deceived by the lie of the facade, came to establish themselves at Sephora's, the strangeness of the guests, the tone of the conversations, drove them away on the first day.

Among these adventurers, Maitre Poitou, or rather Tom Levis, very soon got a position by his gaiety, his suppleness, his business instincts; he invested the servants' money, gained through them the trust of their mistress. How could it be otherwise with that kindly, open, smiling face, that indefatigable impetuosity which made him the precious guest at the *table d'hôte*, attracting customers, the centre of bets and drinks?

The beautiful hostess, so cold, so reserved, was only free with Monsieur Tom; often, in the afternoon, coming in, going out, he stopped in the little office of the hotel, clean, all mirrors and matting. Sephora would tell her business, would show her jewels and books, would consult him about the bill

of fare. They laughed together over love letters, proposals of all kinds she received ; for she was a beauty whom feeling did not affect. Without temperament she kept her *sang froid* everywhere and always, treated passion like a business. One says, it's only the first lover who counts ; Sephora's sexagenarian, chosen by father Leemans, had congealed her blood for ever, and perverted her love. This admirable creature, born in an old curiosity shop and solely for the sake of the old curiosity shop, saw only money and intrigue, and business and trickery in it. Between herself and Tom a bond gradually formed, a friendship of guardian and ward. He advised her, guided her, always with an address of fertility and imagination, that ravished her calm, methodical nature, in which Jewish fatalism mixed with the heavy temperament of Flanders. She never invented, she never imagined anything, she was wholly in the present moment, and Tom's brain, that continually illuminated piece of firework, was bound to dazzle her. What finished the business was hearing the boarder, after he had stammered the most farcical idiocy one night, telling in her ear, as he took his key from the office :

"And you know, not English at all."

From that day she was smitten with him, as a woman sometimes is with an actor, and she alone knows, away from the footlights, the rouge the theatrical costume, the man as he is, and not as he appears to others. Love always longs for such privileges ; besides, they both came from the same Parisian gutter. Narcisse had wallowed in the same kennel that had dirtied the borders of Sephora's skirt ; they both kept the taint and love of the mud from which they sprang. The vulgar characteristics, the vicious instincts which sometimes raised a corner of the Englishman's mask, were seen in flashes and the Biblical lines of Sephora's face, in the irony, in the vulgar laughter of her Salome mouth.

This singular love of the "Beauty and the Beast" only increased as the woman entered further into this mountebank's life, into the confidence of his dodges, of his monkey tricks, from the invention of the cab to that of the numerous waistcoats by whose aid J. Tom Levis, being unable to grow in size, tried at least to appear majestic ; increased as she associated with that haphazard, whirling existence of projects, of dreams, of great and small *coups*. And this monkey man was so acute that after ten years of lawful *bourgeois* co-habitation, he still amused her, charmed her, as when they first met.

Anybody would have been convinced of it who had seen her on that day, lying on the sofa in the little drawing-room, writhing, tumbling about with laughter, saying with an enraptured, ecstatic tone : "How absurd you are—how absurd !" Whilst Tom, in a coloured vest and drawers, reduced to his soberest expression, bald, angular, bony, danced a frenzied jig before her with wooden gestures and wild stamping.

When they were both tired, she of laughing, he of jigging, he threw himself by her on the sofa, approached his ape like face to her angelic head, and, breathing his joy in her face :

"The Sprichts are done for—the Sprichts are dished. I've found my stroke—the grand stroke."

"Quite sure. Who's that ?"

The name he mentioned brought to Sephora's lips a pretty out of disdain.

"What, that great silly ; why, he hasn't got a ha'penny. We have sheared him and his Lion of Illyria. He hasn't that amount of down left on his back."

"Don't joke about the Lion of Illyria, my girl ; merely the skin is worth two hundred millions," recovering his coolness.

The woman's eyes flashed. He repeated emphasising each syllable : "Two hundred millions—two hundred millions."

Then he explained the *coup* to her, coldly, clearly. The point was to get Christian II. to accept the Diet's proposal, and to give up his rights to the crown for the handsome price offered him. In fact, what had he to do ? To give a signature, that was all.

Christian by himself would have decided a long time before. It was his *entourage*, especially the Queen, who stopped him, prevented him from signing the renunciation. He would have to do some day or other. Not a halfpenny in the house. They were in debt to all Saint Mande—to the butcher, to the forage dealer—for, in spite of the poverty of the masters, there were still horses in stables, the household was kept going, the table supplied with an appearance of luxury, with sinister privations underlying. The royal linen, bearing the crown, was in holes in the linen-presses, and was not replaced. The coach-houses were empty, the biggest pieces of plate pawned ; and the servants were hardly sufficient, and often remained several months unpaid. All these details Tom had from Lebeau, who had also told him the story of the two hundred millions proposed at the Leybach Diet, and the scene to which it had given rise.

Since the King was aware that two hundred millions lay quite near to his hand in exchange for a scrawl of ink, he was no longer the same man—didn't laugh, didn't speak—always kept this fixed idea, like a neuralgic pain, on the same side of his forehead. He had ill humours, with great, silent sighs. Yet nothing was changed among his particular servants: secretary, valet, coachman, footman. The same costly luxury of furniture and dress. This Frederique, mad with pride, thinking to hide her distress from all by means of haughtiness, would never have allowed the King to be deprived of anything; when he happened to take a meal in the Rue Herbillon the table had to be luxuriously served. What was wanting, what she could not furnish, was pocket money for the club, for gambling, for women. The King would obviously succumb to that. One fine morning, after a long night at baccara at Bouillotte, being unable to pay, not wishing to owe—fancy Christian posted at the Grand Club—he would take his fountain pen and sign at a stroke his abdication as a monarch. The thing would already have happened, had it not been for old Rosier who, despite Frederique's prohibition, secretly began again to pay for monseigneur. So the plan was to get him to pass the level of small current debets, to lead him into big expenses into numerous liabilities, exceeding the old duke's resources. That required a considerable advance of money.

"But" said Tom Levis, "the affair is so promising that we shall not be wanting in funds. The best thing would be to speak about it to father Leemans, and make it a family job only, what bothers me is the main spring, is the woman!"

"What woman?" asked Sephora, widening her ingenuous look.

"The woman who will undertake to pass the cord round the King's neck. We must have one who will spend like wildfire: a serious girl who can digest any thing; who will at once go for the big pieces.

"Amy Ferat, perhaps."

"Ah, no good—done up, quite done up—and besides, no serious enough. She sups, sings, goes the pace like a regular young girl. Not the woman to squander her little million a month quietly, without seeming to touch it, holding her booty high, haggling about a detail, a square centimetre, and more expensive than a plot of ground in the Rue de la Paix."

"Oh, I fill I know how it ought to be done," said Sephora dreamily; "but who?"

"Ah, there you are, who?"

And the mute laughter between them was equal to a partnership.

"Well, since you've already begun."

"What, so you know?"

"Don't I see his game when he looks at you, and his standing near the wicket, as soon as he thinks I'm gone out? Besides, he doesn't make a mystery of it, and tells his love to anybody who wants to listen. He has even written and signed it in the club book."

On learning the story of the bet, the tranquil Sephora was stirred.

"Ah, really—two thousand louis that he would lie—upon my word, that's too strong."

She got up, took a few steps to quiet her anger, then, returning to her husband:

"You know, Tom, I've had that big stupid hanging about my chair for more than three months—well—not even that!"

You heard the crack of a little finger nail against a tooth, that only wanted to bite.

She was not lying; since Christian had begun the hunt he had got no further than touching the tips of her fingers, nibbling her penholders after her, intoxicating himself with brushing against her skirt. Never had such a thing happened to this Prince Charming, spoilt by women, assailed with seductive smiles and perfumed letters. His handsome, curly head, on which rested the impress of a crown, the heroic legend cleverly bruited about by the Queen, and especially the perfume of seduction which envelops beings who are loved, had procured him genuine successes in the Faubourg. More than one young woman could have shown, curled up on the sofa of her aristocratic boudoir, a marmoset from the royal cage; and in the world of the footlights, which is generally monarchical, to have in her album Christian II.'s portrait at once gave a young lady a position. This man, accustomed to feel eyes, lips, hearts moving towards him, never to cast a look without a quivering answer, had for months been wasting his time before this most calm, most cold nature. She played the moral cashier, counted, cyphered, turned heavy pages, only showing the sighing King the velvety roundness of her profile with the movement of a smile in the corner of the mouth, ending at the eyebrow. The caprice of the Slav was at first amused at the struggle; assumed love was at first mixed up

in it, all eyes in the Grand Club being directed to him ; and it ended in real passion, nourished by the emptiness of his idle existence, in which the flame rose straight without any obstacle. He came every day about five, the best time of the day in Paris, the hour of visits, when the pleasures of the evening are decided on ; and gradually all the young members of the club, who lunched at the Agency, and hovered about Sephora, gave place to him respectfully. This desertion, diminishing the amount of the small running accounts, increased the lady's coldness ; and as the Lion of Illyria brought her nothing, she began to let Christian feel that he was bothering her, that he occupied too royally the half-open angle of her wicket, when it all suddenly changed, from one day to another, after her conversation with Tom.

"Your Majesty was seen last night at the Fantaisies." At this question, emphasised by an anxious and sorrowful look, Christian felt delightfully thrilled.

"Well, I was there."

"Not alone ?"

"But —"

"Ah, there are lucky women."

Quickly, to lessen the provocation of her phrase, she added that she had for a long time a wild desire to go to the little theatre, "to see that Swedish dancer, you know," but her husband never took her anywhere.

He offered to take her there.

"Oh, you are too well known."

"If we keep hidden at the back of a box !"

Briefly, a rendezvous was arranged for next day ; for that happened to be Tom's night out. What a delightful escapade ! She, in the front of the box, in a suitable discreet toilette, enjoying, like a child, to watch the dancing of that foreigner how had her hour of celebrity in Paris—a Swede, with a thin face, with angular gestures, showing beneath her hair locks eyes brilliant and black, and her springs, in her silent bounds, dressed as she was, all in black, resembling a big bat, blindly frightened.

"How amusing—how amusing," said Sephora,

And the dissipated King, motionless behind her, a box of fondants on his knees, did not recall a sweeter voluptuousness than the rustling of her bare arm under the lace, and when she turned towards him with her fresh breath. He accompanied her back to the Saint-Lazare station, because she was

returning to the country, and had an impulse of rapture in the carriage. He drew her to his heart open arms.

"Oh," she said sadly, "you will spoil my pleasure!"

The huge waiting-room on the first floor was deserted, badly lighted. They both sat down on a bench, and Sephora, shivering, took shelter in Christian's ample furs. Here she was no longer afraid, and let herself go, talked to the King in a low voice in his ear. From time to time a railwayman passed, swinging his lantern, or a company of actors living in the suburbs, and returning after the theatre. Among them a couple in close embrace, walking apart.

"How happy they are," she murmured, "Neither bonds nor duties—following the impulse of their hearts—all the rest is foolishness.

She knew something about it, alas! and suddenly, as if carried away, she told him of her sad life, with a sincerity which touched him: the snare, the temptation of the Paris streets for a girl whom her father's greed kept poor; at sixteen the sinister bargain, life over; the four years spent by the side of that old man, to whom she had merely been a nurse; afterwards, not wishing to return again to father Leemans's shop, the necessity of a guide, of a support, which had caused her to marry this Tom Levis, a prosy business man. She had given herself, devoted herself, deprived herself of all pleasure, buried alive in the country, then set to this clerk's work—and that without a word of thanks from this ambitious man, who was wholly absorbed in business, and, at the least desire of revolt, the least wish to live, always threw in her face the past for which she was not responsible.

"That past," she said, getting up, "to which is due the hideous outrage signed with your name in the Grand Club book."

The bell ringing for departure stopped this little theatrical effect just rightly. She moved away with her gliding step, which was followed by the light movements of her black skirt, sent Christian a salute with her eyes, her hand, and left him stupefied, motionless, bewildered by what he had just heard. So she knew? How? Oh, how angry he was with himself for his cowardice for his bragging. He passed the night in writing, in asking forgiveness in a French sown with all the flowers of his national poetry, which compares the beloved one to cooing doves, to the rosy fruit of the azerole.

A wonderful idea of Sephora, that reproach about the bet. It gave her a hold on the King, and for a long time. It

explained also her long coolness, her almost hostile reception, and the clever bargaining she intended to make with regard to her person. Must not a man put up with anything from one he has thus affronted? Christian became the timid and docile servant of all her caprices, her acknowledged cavalier in sight of all Paris; and if the lady's beauty might serve him as an excuse in the world's eyes, the husband's friendship, familiarity, had no pleasing feature.

"My friend, Christian II.," Tom Levis would say, drawing up his small figure.

He once had the idea of receiving him at Courbevoie; a fact which gave Spricht one of those jealous fits which hastened the end of the illustrious talior. The King went over the house and park, went on the yacht, agreed to let himself be photographed on the doorsteps, between his hosts, who wanted to perpetuate the memory of that unforgettable day; and at night, whilst fireworks were let off in his Majesty's honour, Sephora, leaning on Christian's arm, remarked:

"Oh how I should love you, if you were not a king."

It was the first avowal, and very adroit; all the mistresses he had had up till then adored in him the sovereign, the glorious title, the line of ancestors. This one loved him for himself.

"If you were not a king."

He was a king so little, he would so willingly have sacrificed to her a shred of dynastic purple, which hardly stuck to his shoulders.

Another time she explained herself still better, when he was disquieted by finding her weeping and pale.

"I'm much afraid that soon we shall not see each other any more," she replied.

"And why?"

"He told me just now business was going too bad to continue it in France, that he would have to shut up shop, go and establish himself elsewhere."

"He's taking you with him?"

"Oh! I'm only a clog on his ambition. He said: 'Come if you like.' However, I must follow him. What would become of me, all alone here?"

"You naughty girl, am I not here?"

She looked at him fixedly in the eyes.

"Yes, it's true, you love me, you do. And I also love you. I might belong to you, without shame. But no—it's impossible."

"Impossible ?" he asked panting after the half-revealed paradise.

"You are too high for Sephora Levis, monseigneur."

And he, with adorable fatuity :

"But I shall raise you up to myself. I shall make you countess, duchess. It is one of the privileges that remain to me ; and we shall easily find somewhere in Paris a love-nest where I'll establish you in a fashion worthy of your rank, where we shall live quite by ourselves, only ourselves."

"Oh, it would be too beautiful."

She dreamed, raising her eyes like a little girl, candid and moist. Then, energetically :

"But no ; you are a king. One day you would leave me, quite happy—"

"Never."

"And if you're recalled."

"Where to ? Illyria ? Why, it's all over for ever. I missed last year one of those opportunities which do not come twice."

"Really ?" she queried, with a joy which was not feigned. "Oh ! if I were certain,"

He had a word on his lips to convince her, a word he did not utter, but she understood ; and that night J. Tom Levis, whom Sephora kept *au courant*, declared solemnly that "the time had come ; the father must be informed."

Leemans, fascinated, like his daughter, by Tom Levi's imagination, his communicative *verve*, his inventive patter, had several times put money in the *coups* of the Agency. After winning, he lost, according to the chances of gambling ; but when he had been "had," as he called it, twice or three times, the worthy man took a definite pose. He did not reproach, did not fly into a temper, knowing business too well and detesting useless words ; but when his son-in-law began to talk about lending money for one of those castles in the air which his eloquence raised to the skies, the merchant had a smile in his beard, signifying very clearly : "No ; I've had enough, and a lowering of the eyelids which seemed to bring back Tom's extravagances to reason, to the level of feasible things. The other knew it, and as he wisely held that the Illyrian business should not go out of the family, he sent Sephora to the dealer, who, as he grew old, had been taken with a sort of affection for his only child, in whom he felt himself live again.

Since his wife's death, Leemans had given up his curiosity shop in the Rue de la Paix, contenting himself with his dealer's shop. It was there Sephora went early one morning, so as to be sure of finding him for the old man was little at home. Hugely wealthy, and retired from business, at least in appearance, he went on roaming about Paris from morning till night, following the sales, looking for the atmosphere, the movement of business, and especially watching with wonderful acuteness the crowd of small dealers, industrials, merchants of pictures, of curios, with whom he was a partner, without avowing it, from fear of his fortune being guessed at.

Sephora, by a caprice, a reminiscence of her youth, came on foot to the Rue Eginhard from the Rue Royale, following almost the way by which she once used to go to the shop. It was not eight. The air was sharp, the carriages few, and about the Bastille there remained an orange shade of the dawn, in which the gilt genius of the column had the air of dipping its wings. On this side, by all the dependent streets, issued a pretty crowd of Faubourg girls going to work.

Sephora was not sentimental, and never saw anything outside the present affair and hour ; still, that confused tramping, that hurried rustling around amused her. She found her own youth again in all those girls' faces, in that morning sky, in that curious old quarter, where each street bears at its corner, on a frame, the names of the principal traders, which had not changed for fifteen years. Passing under the black arch serving as entry to the Rue Eginhard, on the side of the Rue Saint-Paul, she caught sight of the Rabbi's long robe as he went to the neighbouring synagogue ; two steps farther, the rat-killer, with his pole and board, from which hung hairy corpses, a type of old Paris which you only find now among that mass of mouldy houses where all the rats of the town have their general quarters ; farther yet, a cabman, whom every morning of her life as a working girl she had seen starting in this way, heavy in his big boots, little fitted for walking, holding carefully in his hand, quite upright, like a communicant's taper, the whip which is the driver's sword, the sign of his rank, which never leaves him. At the door of the two or three shops composing the whole street, whose shutters were being removed, she saw the same rags hanging in masses, heard the same Hebrew and Teutonic mixture ; and when, after having passed the low porch of her father's house, the small court and four steps leading to the shop, she pulled the string of the

worn-out bell, it seemed as if fifteen yeas had been lifted from her shoulders—fifteen years that truly had hardly weighed upon her.

Just as then, Darnet came to open the door, a robust Auvergnate, whose shining, ruddy face, with dark complexion, her tightly knotted shawl, the black coif edged with white, seemed to be in mourning for a coal shop. Her role in the house was visible, merely in her manner of opening the door to Sephora, merely in the thin-lipped smile which the two women exchanged face to face.

"My father is there?"

"Yes, madame, in the workshop. I'll call him."

"Don't bother, I know where it is."

She crossed the anteroom, the drawing-room, took only three steps in the garden—a black pit between high walls, in which a few trees grew up—encumbered in its narrow paths by innumerable bits of scrap iron, leadwork, railings, strong chains, oxidised and blackened metal, matched well with the gloomy box trees, with the greenish tone of the old garden fountain. On another side a shed overflowing with debris, the carcasses of broken furniture of all periods, with heaps of tapestry rolled up in the corners; on another, a workshop with ground glass panes to escape the indiscretions of adjoining floors. There a pile of wealth, their true value known only by the old man, rose up to the ceiling in apparent disorder—lanterns, lustres, torch stands, panoplies, incense burners, antique or foreign bronzes, at the end two forges, joiners', locksmiths' apparatus. There the dealer mended, copied, rejuvenated old models with prodigious skill, and the patience of a Benedictine. The noise was once loud from morning till night, five or six workmen surrounding the master; you would hear no more now than a hammer's click on refined metal, a scratching of files, lit up at night by a single lamp, showing that the shop still existed.

When his daughter entered, old Leemans, in a big leather apron, his shirt sleeves tucked up on his hairy arms, as if they had picked up particles of copper from the bench, was in the act of forging in the Vice a Louis XIII. chandelier, of which he had the model under his eyes. At the sound of the door he raised his red head, lost in hair and a beard of whitey red, and knit his thick, uneven eyebrows, whence his glance appeared as if between the falling bristles of a Skye terrier.

"Morning, pa," said Sephora, who pretended not to see his embarrassed gesture, as he tried to hide the candlestick he

held, as he did not like to be seen or disturbed at his work.

"It's you dear?"

He rubbed his old muzzle against the delicate cheeks.

"What's happened to you?" he asked, pushing her into the garden. "Why have you got up so early?"

"I've something very important to tell you."

"Well come in."

He pulled her towards the house.

"Oh, but you know, I don't want Darnet to be there."

"Good—good," said the old man, smiling and going in. He cried to the servant, who was brightening up the glass of a Venetian mirror, always cleaning, furbishing, with a forehead like a waxed floor:

"Darnet, go into the garden and see if I'm there," and the tone in which it was said showed that the old Pasha had not yet abdicated to his favourite slave.

The father and daughter remained alone in the small, neat, *bourgeois* little drawing-room, whose furniture, covered with white holland, the little wool carpets at the foot of the chairs, contrasted with the dusty riches in the shed and workshop, like those excellent cooks who only like the most simple dishes. Father Leemans, so expert and fastidious in matters of art, did not possess in his house the least object of art, and clearly proved himself thereby the tradesman he was, estimating, trafficking, exchanging, without passion or regret, not like those artists in curios who, before giving up a rarity, trouble themselves about the way in which the amateur may be able to set it off to make it effective—alone on the walls was his big, full-length portrait, signed Wattelet, and representing him among his ironwork, working at the forge. It was certainly he, a little less white, but unchanged, always thin, always bent, always the doglike head, with the red, flat beard, the long hair, only leaving visible of the face a nose reddened by perpetual inflammation which gave a drunkard's look to this sober tea-drinker.

"What now?" he queried, with a cunning look at his daughter.

"A big thing, pa."

She drew from her bag a bundle of bills of draughts, bearing Christian's signature.

"These must be discounted. Will you do it?"

Merely at seeing the writing, the old man made a grimace,

which puckered up his whole face, and made it almost entirely disappear in his fleece of hair, with the motion of a hedgehog on the defensive.

"Illyrian paper! Thank you, I know it. Your husband must be mad to give you such a commission. Have you really come to that?"

Without being disturbed by this reception, which she expected.

"Listen," she said, and with her calm air she told him about the affair, the big stroke in detail, with proofs to support it, the number of the *Quernaro* in which was related the sitting of the Diet, some letters of Lebeau informing them of the situation—the King, madly in love, was engaged in establishing his mistress. A superb hotel in the Avenue de Messine, a furnished house, with equipages of all kinds, was wanted by him for the lady, and he was ready to sign as many bills as might be needful, at any rate of interest that might be wanted. Leemans now opened his ears, made objections, inquiries, ferreted into all the corners of this business which was so cleverly prepared.

"When would the bills fall due?"

"In three months."

"In three months?"

"In three months."

She made a gesture of tightening a running noose, a fold of her mouth compressing her calm lips.

"And the interest?"

"As large as you like; the heavier the bills, the better for us. He must have no other resource but to sign his abdication."

"And when it's once signed?"

"Then it concerns the woman. She has a gentleman worth two hundred millions to exploit."

"And if she keeps it all for herself, we must have a woman of whom we are devilish certain."

"We are certain of her."

"Who is it?"

"You don't know her," said Sephora, without flinching, putting back all the papers into a small bag.

"Stop that," returned the old man quickly; "it's a deal of money, you know—a big risk. I'll speak to Pichery."

"Take care, pa, we mustn't have too many in the know; there are already us, Lebeau, now you. If you are going to let in other people——"

"Only Pichery. As you may imagine, I couldn't do it by myself, it's a lot of money—a lot of money."

She answered coldly.

"Oh, we'll want a lot more."

A silence. The old man reflected.

"Well then," he said, "I'll do the business; but on one condition. That house in the Avenue de Messine, it must be furnished fashionably. Now, I'll furnish the works of art."

In the trafficking of the usurer, the dealer showed his claw. Sephora burst into a fit of laughter, showing all her teeth.

"Oh, the 'ole clo,' the 'ole clo,'" she exclaimed, making use of the phrases she suddenly found suitable to the atmosphere of the curiosity shop, and which contrasted with her distinction of toilet and manners.

"Well, we're agreed, pa; you will furnish the curios, but—nothing from mamma's collection, pray."

Under that hypocritical label—Madame Leemans's collection—the trader had gathered together a quantity of spoilt, unsaleable objects, of which he rid himself at magnificent prices, thanks to that sentimental grimace, never letting relics of his dear departed be detached from the precious collection, except that they were paid for in their weight of gold.

"You understand me, old pa—no nonsense, no rubbish, the lady knows about things."

"You believe that she knows?" said the old dog in his moustaches.

"Like you and me, I tell you."

"But then——"

He approached his face, his old face, to the pretty young one, and on both was written the trading spirit, on the old parchment and on the rose-leaf down.

"Come now, what is this woman? You can tell me now that I am in the know."

"It is——"

She stopped a moment, fastened the broad strings of her bonnet under the refined oval of her face, cast at the mirror the satisfied look of a pretty woman, in which was mingled a new pride.

"It is the Comtesse de Spalato," she said gravely.

Chapter Eight

THE QUEEN MAKES A SCENE

ALL the magic of a June night entered by the wide, open casement of the great hall at Saint-Mande, where a single lighted candelabrum left sufficient mystery for the moonlight to beat against the walls, like a milky way, to illumine the polished bar of the trapeze, the arched bow of a suspended guzla, or the glass of a poorly furnished bookcase, which was now filled up by Boscovich's collection, exhaling the musty, faded odour of a cemetery of dried plants. On the table, across some dusty papers, lay a crucifix of black and silver; for if Christian II. hardly wrote at all, he remembered his Catholic education, surrounded himself with objects of piety, and sometimes, when merrymaking with women, whilst the sounds of pleasure were ringing around him, he would feel in his pocket, with a hand already uncertain from drink, for the coral rosary which never left him. By the side of the cross, a broad, heavy sheet of parchment, covered with a big, rather shaky handwriting—it was royalty's death warrant already drawn up. It only wanted the signature, a stroke of the pen, but also a violent decision of will and that was why the weak Christian II. was delaying, his two elbows leaning on the table, motionless under the light of the candles prepared for the royal scene.

Near him, restless, prying, velvety as a night-moth, or the black bat that haunts ruins, Lebeau, the confidential valet, watched him, mutely urged him on, for he had at last reached the decisive moment which the gang had expected for months, with ups and downs of feeling, all the heart beatings, all the uncertainties of a game dependent on that cypher of a king. Despite the magnetism of that oppressive desire, Christian, pen in hand, was still not signing. Sunk in his arm-chair, he looked at the parchment, and was dreaming. It was not that he held to that crown, which he had never desired or liked, which as a child he found too heavy, and whose harsh bonds and crushing responsibilities he had experienced later on. To put it aside, to leave it in a corner of the *Salon* where he no longer went, to forget it outside as much as possible, had already been done; but the determination it was necessary to come to, the decisive part to play, frightened him.

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ady been done ; but the determination it was necessary
ome to, the decisive part to play, frightened him.

There was, however, no other way of getting the money indispensable to his new life : three millions worth of bills signed by him, on which payment would soon fall due, and which the moneylender, a certain Pichery, a picture dealer, did not want to renew. Could he allow everything to be sold up at Saint-Mande ? And the Queen and the royal child, what would then become of them ? He foresaw the terrible scandal of his cowardice, and foreseeing this, was it not better to end it at once, to brave, once for all, the anger and reproaches ? And then, and then, all that even was not the determining cause.

He had promised the comtesse to sign this abdication, and on the strength of the promise Sephora had agreed to let her husband go off alone to London, accepted the *hotel* in the Avenue de Messine, the title and the name which advertised her as belonging to Christian, reserving other favours for the day on which Christian himself would bring her the deed, signed by his hand. For that she gave the reasons of a woman in love : perhaps he might want, later on, to return to Illyria, to desert her for throne and power ; she would not be the first whom dreadful State reasons had made tremble and weep. And D'Axel, Wattelet, all the swells of the Grand Club, hardly suspected when the King, leaving the Avenue de Messine, came to join them at the club, his eyes downcast and feverish, that he had spent the evening on a sofa, continually repulsed and encouraged, vibrating as tensely as a stretched bow, rolling at the feet of an implacable will, of a supple resistance, which abandoned to his mad embraces the ice of two small Parisian hands, skilful in evasion, in defence, whilst her lips inflamed him with the enrapturing phrases :

"Oh, when you are no longer King,—I'm yours, all yours," for she made him pass through the dangerous alternations of passion and coldness ; and sometimes at the theatre, after an icy greeting, a conventional smile, she had a certain slow way of taking off her gloves whilst looking at him, and giving her hand as a first offering for his kisses.

"So, my poor Lebeau, you say this Pichery won't do anything ?

"Nothing, sir ; if he is not paid the bills will be sent to the bailiff."

You should have heard the despairing groan with which the word "bailiff" was underlined, in order to impress upon the King all the sinister formalities which would follow : the bills

rotested, an execution, the royal family profaned, thrown on the street. Christian himself saw nothing of this. He was driving down there in the middle of the night, anxious and quivering, ascending stealthily the mysteriously covered staircase, entering the room where the night light was languishing under the shade. "It's done. I'm no longer King. You are mine—all—all," and the fair one was taking her loves off.

"Come," he cried, starting out of his fleeting vision. And he signed.

The door opened, the Queen appeared. Her presence in Christian's room at that hour was so new a thing, so unforeseen, they had lived so long far apart from each other, that neither the King, in the act of signing his disgrace, nor Lebeau, who was watching him, turned round at the slight noise. They thought Boscovich was coming up from the garden.

Gliding lightly like a shadow, she was already near the table and the two accomplices, when Lebeau perceived her. With her finger on her lips, she ordered him to be silent, and continued to advance, wishing to catch the King in his treason, to avoid circumlocutions, subterfuges, useless dissimulations; but the valet braved her prohibition by giving the alarm.

"The Queen, sire."

In her fury, the Dalmatian struck, with the strong palm of a horsewoman, right in the face of this mischievous brute; and standing upright, she waited till the wretch had gone, before addressing the King.

"What's the matter, my dear Frederique, and why do you honour me with——?"

Standing up, half bending over the table, he tried to hide from her, in a supple pose which showed off his foulard jacket, embroidered in pink. He smiled, his lips rather pale, but his voice calm, his speech easy, with that elegance of politeness from which he never departed in regard to his wife, and which set between them, as it were, a hard lacquer screen, decorated with flowery arabesques. With one word, one gesture, she put aside this barrier behind which he sheltered himself.

"Oh, no phrases, no grimaces. I know what you are sitting there; don't try and lie to me."

Then, approaching, dominating his timid degradation with her proud bearing:

"Listen to me, Christian"—and that extraordinary fami-

liarity in her mouth lent something serious, solemn, to her words—"listen to me. You've caused me much suffering since I've been your wife; I've only spoken to you once about it—the first time—you may remember. Afterwards, when I saw that you no longer loved me, I let you go on, but I was not ignorant of anything—not one of your infidelities, your follies—because you must really be mad, mad as your father, who exhausted himself with love for Lola; mad as your grandfather Jean, who died in a shameful delirium, foaming kisses at his death rattle, with words that made the nursing sisters grow pale. No doubt it's the same burnt-out blood, the same lava of hell, which is eating you up. At Ragusa, on the sortie nights, it was at Fœdor's they went to look for you. I knew it; I knew she had left her theatre to follow you. I never reproached you at all, the honour of your name remains safe; and when the King was absent from the ramparts, I took care that his place was not empty. But in Paris—in Paris—"

Till then she had spoken slowly, coldly, in a tone of pity and maternal reproach, as if inspired to it by the lowered eyes and sulky mouth of the King, who resembled a bad boy being scolded. The name of Paris, however, exasperated her—a city without faith, cynical and accursed, its bloodstained stones always ready for sedition, for barricades! What induced all these poor, fallen kings to take refuge in such a Sodom? It was Paris, its atmosphere tainted with carnage, with vice, that finished the destruction of historical houses, it was this through which Christian had lost what the maddest of his forefathers had known how to preserve—the pride of their escutcheon. Oh, from the day of their arrival, from their first night of exile, when she saw him so gay, so excited, whilst all were secretly weeping, Frederique had foreseen the humiliations and shames she was going to have to undergo—then, in one breath, without stopping, with cutting words that spotted with red the royal rake's livid face, striped it as with whip strokes, she recalled to him all his follies, his rapid gliding from folly into vice, and from vice right down into crime.

"You have deceived me, under my eyes, in my house—adultery at my table, and touching my dress. When you had enough of that curlyhaired doll, who did not even conceal her tears, you went to the gutter, to the mud of the streets, wallowing shamelessly in your idleness, bringing us back the morrows of your orgies, your wornout remorse, all the pollution

of that filth. Remember how I saw you, tottering and stammering that morning, when you lost your throne a second time. What have you not done? Holy Mother of Angels, what have you not done? You've trafficked with the royal seal; sold crosses, titles."

And, in a lower voice, as if she feared that the silence and the night might hear her:

"You've stolen too—you've stolen—those diamonds, those torn-out jewels, it was you; and I allowed my old Groeb to be suspected and dismissed. It was necessary, the theft being known, to find a sham culprit in order to prevent the real one from being guessed; because that has been my single and constant preoccupation—to keep the King upright, intact, to accept everything for that object, even the shames, which in the eyes of the world will doubtless end by soiling myself. I had made myself a fighting watchword that stimulated me, sustained me in the hours of ordeal: 'For the Crown!'; and now you want to sell it; that crown which has caused me so much anguish and tears, you wish to barter it for gold, for that death mask of a Jewess whom you had the effrontery to flaunt in the face of Paris."

He was listening, without saying anything—crushed, with lowered head. The insult to the woman he loved aroused him. And, gazing fixedly at the Queen, his face showing the blows he had received, he said, still politely, but very decidedly:

"Well, you're wrong; the woman of whom you speak counts for nothing in the resolution I have taken. What I'm doing is for you, for me, for the good of us all. Come, are you not tired of this life of expedients of privations? Do you believe I don't know what's happening here—that I do not suffer when I see at your heels this pack of tradesmen of creditors? The other day when that man was shouting in the courtyard, I was coming in, I heard him. If it had not been for Rosen I would have crushed him under my phaeton wheels. And you watching his departure behind your window curtains! Fine thing for a queen! We're in debt to everybody. There's a general outcry against us. Half of your servants are waiting for their wages: this tutor of yours has had nothing for ten months, Madame de Silvis pays herself by majestically wearing your old dresses. And sometimes my councillor, keeper of the crown seals, borrows money from my valet to buy snuff—you see, I'm quite up to date—and

you don't know my debts. I am crushed by them ; everything will soon go to smash. That will be a nice state of things. You will see your diadem sold in a rag shop, with old napkins and iron."

Gradually carried away by his scoffing nature and the frivolous habits of his set, he dropped the reserved tone with which he began, and, in his little, insolent, nasal voice, turned to humorous phrases and stories, many among which were of Sephora's invention, who never lost an opportunity of demolishing by mockery her lover's last scruples.

"You accuse me of making phrases, my dear, but it is you who bewilder yourself with words. What, after all, is that crown of Illyria, about which you are always speaking to me? It's only valuable on a king's head ; otherwise it is an encumbering, useless thing, which is hidden, for purposes of flight in a bonnet box, or which is exposed under a globe, like an actor's laurels, or a concierge's orange blossoms. You must really persuade yourself of one thing, Frederique—a king is only a king on his throne, with power in his hands, fallen, he's less than nothing, a rag. Vainly do we cling to etiquette, to our titles, exhibiting our Majesties everywhere, on the panels of carriages, on the studs of our cuffs, clogging ourselves with a ceremonial which is out of place. All that is hypocrisy on our part, politeness and pity with those who surround us, our friends, our servants. Here I am King Christian II.—for you, for Rosen, a few loyal ones. As soon as I am outside I become a man like others—Mr Christian II., not even a surname ; only Christian, like a low actor of the Gaite."

He stopped, short of breath, not remembering ever to have spoken so long, standing. Some shrill notes of birds broke the silence of the night. A big moth, which had signed its wings at the light, was knocking itself everywhere. The only sounds were this fluttering distress and the stifled sobs of the Queen, who knew well how to encounter rage, violence, but was defenceless in the presence of mockery, which took her sincere nature at a disadvantage, like a brave soldier who expects downright blows, and finds himself harassed by insect stings. Seeing her weakness, Christian thought her vanquished, and, to finish her off, put the finishing stroke to his burlesque picture of monarchs in exile. "What a pitiable figure they all cut, these poor princes *in partibus*, shadows of royalty, draping themselves in the frippery of the chief roles, continuing to declaim before the empty benches, and not a

halfpenny of receipts. Would they not do better to be silent, to return to common life and obscurity? There is an excuse for those who have wealth. It is a luxury, after all, that obstinate clinging to grandeur; but the others there, their poor cousins of Palermo, for instance, herded together in a house too small for them, with their cursed Italian cookery! You can always smell onions when you enter the house—worthy people, certainly, but what a life! And they are not the most unfortunate. The other day a Bourbon—a genuine Bourbon—ran after an omnibus. 'Full up, sir.' He went on running. 'But I tell you it's full up my poor old man.' He lost his temper; he wanted to be called monseigneur—as if that could be seen by his cravat. Operetta kings, I tell you, my dear. And it is to escape from this ridiculous position, to secure an assured and dignified existence, that I have resolved to sign this."

He added, revealing all at once the tortuous Slav, brought up by the Jesuits:

"Besides, observe that this signature is a jest. They return us our property after all, and I don't consider myself in any way bound. Who knows? these millions may perhaps help us to reconquer the throne."

The Queen impetuously raised her head, fixed him for a moment with a look that made him flinch, then, shrugging her shoulders:

"Don't make yourself out viler than you are. You know well, that when once signed— But no, the truth is, that you lack strength, that you are deserting your kingly post at the most dangerous moment, when the new society, which wants neither God nor master, pursues with its hatred the representatives of Divine right, makes the heavens tremble over their heads, and the ground under their feet. Knives, bombs, bullets, anything will do—provided it is murderous—in the midst of our processions or *fetes*. The best as well as the worst of us tremble when a man steps out of the crowd; every petition may hide a poniard. On leaving his palace, who can be sure of returning to it? And this is the hour you choose—you—to run away from the battlefield."

"Ah, if it was only a question of fighting," said Christian II. quickly; "but to struggle like us against ridicule, poverty, all the dunghap of life, to feel that you're sinking deeper every day."

She had a flame of hope in her eyes.

"True ; would you fight ? Then listen."

Breathlessly she related, in a few brief words, the expedition Elysee and she had been preparing for three months, sending letter after letter, speeches, despatches, with Father Alphee always journeying among the villages and over the mountain ; for this time it was not to the nobility they appealed, but to the common people—the muleteers, the porters of Ragusa, the market gardeners of Breno, of Labrazza, the islanders who go to market in feluccas, the primitive and traditional nation, ready to rise, to die for the King, but on condition of seeing him at their head. Companies were forming, the watchword was already circulating, and they were only waiting for a signal. And the Queen, hurling her words in a vigorous charge at Christian's weakness, felt a pang of pain at seeing him shake his head, even more indifferent than despondent. Perhaps, in reality, he felt likewise a bitterness that it should all have been prepared without him. He did not, however, believe the project realisable. It would be impossible to advance into the country ; they would have to hold the islands, devastate a beautiful country with very little chances of succeeding. What happened to the Duke de Palma's expedition ?—a useless shedding of blood.

"No ; look you, my dear friend, the fanaticism of your chaplain and that hotheaded Gascon are leading you astray. I too have my information, and more trustworthy than yours. The truth is, that in Dalmatia, as elsewhere, monarchy has had its day. They've had enough of it there ; they don't want any more."

"Ah, I know well myself the coward who doesn't want any more of it," said the Queen.

Then she hurried out, leaving Christian much astonished that the scene should have been so short. He very quickly put the deed in his pocket, ready himself to go, when Frederique returned, accompanied this time by the little prince.

Awakened in the midst of sleep, dressed in all haste, Zara, who had just passed from the hands of his nurse to those of the queen without a word being uttered, opened wide eyes under his light curls, but put no questions, remembering confusedly in his little, still dizzy head, similar awakenings for hurried flights, amid pale faces and breathless cries. It was in that way he had acquired the habit of abandoning himself, of letting himself be taken anywhere, provided the Queen called him in her grave and resolute voice, that he felt the

tender embrace of her arms and her shoulders all ready to support him when tired. She had said to him "Come," and he came with confidence, surprised only at the calm of things compared with those other tempestuous, bloodstained nights in which flames arose, the boom of cannon, the rattle of fusillades.

He saw the King standing, not that careless and kindly father who sometimes surprised him in bed, or crossed the schoolroom with an encouraging smile, but one with an annoyed and severe expression, which was harshly emphasised at their entry.

Frederique, without saying a word, drew the child to the feet of Christian II., and, kneeling with an abrupt movement, placed him standing before her, joined his little fingers in her joined hands :

"The King does not want to hear me, he will hear you, perhaps, Zara. Come, say after me, 'My father.'"

The timid voice repeated, "My father."

"My father, my king, I conjure you, do not rob your child, don't take from him that crown he is one day to wear. Remember it does not belong to you alone, that it comes from afar, from on high, that it comes from God, who placed it six hundred years ago in the house of Illyria. God wishes me to be a king, my father ; it is my heritage, my property, you have no right to take it from me."

The little prince accompanied his fervent murmur with the imploring looks of a prayer. Christian, however, turned away his head, shrugged his shoulders, and, furious, though always polite, muttered a few words between his teeth :

"Excitement—improper scene—turning this child's head."

Then he got away from them, and was making for the door. With a bound the Queen was standing up, looked at the table, which was empty of the parchment which had been spread out on it, and understanding that the disgraceful deed was signed, that he had it with him, fairly bellowed out :

"Christian !"

He went on walking.

She made a step, the gesture of gathering up her dress to pursue him, then, suddenly :

"Well, so be it."

He stopped, saw her standing upright before the open window, her foot on the narrow stone balcony, with one arm carrying her son to death, and with the other threatening the

coward who was running away. All the lights of night-time lit up from outside this wonderful group.

"To an operetta king, a queen of tragedy!" she cried, grave and terrible. "If you do not at once burn what you have just signed, swearing on the cross that you will never again do so, your race is ended, crushed—your wife—your child—there, on those steps."

Such intensity inspired her vibrating voice, her magnificent figure, bent towards space as if to leap, that the King, terrified, rushed to stop her.

"Frederique!"

At his father's cry, at the trembling of the arm that held him, the child, who was quite outside the window, thought all was over, that they were going to die. He uttered not a word, nor a moan—was he not going to die with his mother? But his small hands clung to the Queen's neck, and, throwing back his head, with his fair hair hanging down, the little victim shut his eyes before the overwhelming horror of the fall.

Christian was no longer able to resist. He was overcome by the resignation, the courage of this child, who already knew the first of his future kingly duties—how to die well. His heart was bursting. He threw the crumpled parchment, which he had for a moment been nervously holding in his hand, on the table, and fell into an arm-chair sobbing. Frederique, still suspicious, read the deed thorough, from the first line to the signature, then going to a candle, burnt it till the flame scorched her fingers, shaking the ashes over the table; then she went out of the room, taking her son, who was already going to sleep in her arms in his heroic attitude of suicide.

Chapter Nine

ARMS AND THE KING

IT is the end of a meal among friends in the parlour of the curio-dealer's shop. Old Leemans, when he is alone, eats a crust at one end of the kitchen table, opposite Darnet, without table-cloth, without napkin; when there is company, like this evening, the careful Auvergnate removes, grumbling, the white covers from the furniture, puts away the small squares of carpet, and sets the table in front of the portrait of "Monsieur" in the quiet, neat parlour, which is for a few hours filled with the odours of garlic and discussions, also very strong, in the slang of low tradespeople.

Since the "grand stroke" is being prepared, those dinners at the dealer's are frequent. It is well, in business of this kind, in which people go halves, to meet often, to act in concert throughout; and nowhere could it be done so securely as at the bottom of that little Rue Eginhard, forgotten in the past of old Paris. Here, at any rate, you can speak loud, discuss, combine. The end is near. In a few days—no! in a few hours—the abdication will be signed, and the affair, which has already swallowed up so much money, will begin to return a great deal. The certainty of success brightens the eyes and voices of the guests with a gilded joyfulness, makes the tablecloth whiter, the wine better: a real wedding dinner presided over by father Leemans and Pichery, his inseparable—a wooden-looking head, stiff and pomaded *a la hongrois* above a buckram stock; something military and not frank; the air of a degraded officer. Profession; usurer in pictures, a new, complicated business, well suited to the art maniacs of our time. When a young man is high and dry, cleaned out, up a tree, he goes to Pichery, picture dealer in his sumptuous establishment in the Rue Laffitte.

"Have you a Corot, a genuine Corot? I am mad about that painter."

"Ah! Corot!" Pichery remarks, closing his dead-fish eyes with rapt admiration; then, suddenly changing his tone: "I've just what you want," and he shows, rolled forward on a big easel, a very pretty Corot, a morning all trembling with silvery mists, and dances of nymphs beneath the willows. The fop puts up his eyeglass, makes a pretence of admiring.

"First class!—very first class! How much?"

"Fifty thousand francs," answers Pichery, without flinching. The other does not flinch either.

"At three months?"

"At three months—with security."

The fop puts his name to the bill, carries off the picture to his rooms and his mistress, and for a whole day gives himself the pleasure of saying at the club, on the boulevard, that he has just bought "a wonder of a Corot." Next day he sends his Corot to auction, and Pichery buys it again, through father Leemans, for ten or twelve thousand francs, its true price. It is usury at an exorbitant rate, but legal usury, without dangers. Pichery, on his side, is not bound to know whether the amateur buys seriously or not. He sells his Corot very dear; and he is within his rights, because the value of an object of art is

arbitrary. Besides, he takes care to do business only in authentic merchandise, guaranteed by old Leemans, who, moreover, furnishes him with all his art vocabulary, which is surprising enough in the mouth of that painted old soldier, who is on the best terms with the gilded youth and all the cocottes of the Quartier de l'Opera, who are very necessary to his business.—On the other side of the patriarch Leemans, Sephora and her husband, their chairs and glasses close together, play at lovers. They see each other so seldom since the beginning of the affair! J. Tom Levis, who, everyone believes, is in London, lives shut up in his villa at Courbevoie, angles all day for want of dupes to snare, or occupies himself with playing terrible practical jokes on Spricht. Sephora, kept more strictly than a Spanish queen, expecting the king at every hour, surrounded by ceremony and dressed to the nines, leads the life of the first-class *demi-monde*, a life is so occupied, and so little amusing, that these ladies live almost always in twos in order to endure the long, tedious drives or the disheartening idleness. The Countess de Spalato, however, has not her equal in the town. She cannot associate with the kept women or the unclassed of this intermediate world; respectable women do not meet her, and Christian II. could not endure around her the whirlwind of idlers who fill the drawing-rooms which only men visit. So she remains always alone in her boudoir with the painted ceilings, with the mirrors, garlanded with roses and flying cupids, which never reflect any but her own indolent image, and bored by all the sickly sentiment the King guesses out at her feet, like perfumess for sick headaches smoking on cups of gold. Ah! how quickly would she give all that royally dull life for the little basement in the Rue Royale, with her clown in front of her performing the jig of the Grand Strokes! She is hardly able even to write to him, to keep him in touch with the business and its progress.

Therefore, how happy she is this evening, how she presses against him, excites him, spurs him to his best! "Come, make me laugh." And Tom stirs himself a great deal; but his merriment is not frank, and falls back, after each outburst, into a worrying thought which he does not mention, which I would give you a thousand times to guess right. Tom Levis is jealous. He is aware there cannot be anything yet between Christian and Sephora, that she is far too astute to have given herself without a guarantee; but the psychological moment is at hand; as soon as the paper is signed it

must be acted on ; and, my goodness ! our friend Tom feels troubles, anxieties, very strange in a man devoid of all superstition, of all childishness. Little, feverish, timorous chills run through him as he looks at his wife, who never seemed to him so pretty—a prettiness enhanced by her toilette and the title of countess, which appears to refine her features, brighten her eyes, adorn her hair with a coronet of pearls. Obviously, J. Tom Levis is not up to his part ; he has not shoulders strong enough for it. For a mere nothing he would take back his wife and throw up the whole business. But shame restrains him, the fear of ridicule, and, further, the large amount of money already involved in the affair. The poor fellow struggles with himself, tormented by these divers scruples of which the countess would never have thought him capable ; he affects great gaiety, gesticulates with a dagger in his heart, enlivens the table by relating some of the clever tricks of the Agency, and ends by putting such spirits into old Leemans, and the glacial Pichery himself, that they produce their best humorous stories, their best tales of mystifications of amateurs.

They are there—are they not ?—among partners, among pals, and elbows on table. Everything is laid bare—the inward workings of the auction room, its traps and pitfalls, the coalition of the big traders—rivals in appearance—their exchanges, their hard Auvergnat traffickings, that mysterious freemasonry which sets a real barrier of greasy collars and worn-out coats between a rare object of art and a buyer's caprice, compels him into absurdities, into huge sums of money. It is a joust of cynical stories, a tournament to show forth the most astute, the most scoundrelly.

"Did I tell you the story of my Egyptian lantern and Mora ?" asks father Leemans, sipping his coffee in little gulps ; and he begins, for the hundredth time—like old soldiers their favourite campaign—the story of that lantern which a Levantine in difficulties let him have for two thousand francs, and which he sold again the same day for forty thousand to the President of the Council, with a double commission, five hundred from the Levantine and five thousand from the duke. But what constitute the charm of the tale are the ruses, the tricks, the way in which the head of the rich, vain client was turned. "Yes, no doubt, a fine piece, but too dear, much too dear. I beg of you, Monsieur le Duc, let someone else commit that folly. I am quite sure that the Sismondos—ah, heavens, it's a pretty work, those little chasings round it, that wrought

chain"—and the old man, stirred up by the laughter that shakes the table, turns over on the tablecloth the leaves of a small dog-eared pocket book, in which his inspiration is fed by the help of a date, a number, an address. All the famous amateurs are classed in it, like heiresses of big fortune in the big book of Monsieur de Foy, with their peculiarities, their manias—the dark and the fair, those who require bullying, those who only believe in the value of an article if it costs a great deal, the sceptical amateur, the *naïf* amateur, to whom you might say, as you sell him a fraud: "And you know, never let anybody take it from you." The pocketbook was in itself a fortune.

"I say, Tom," Sephora suggests to her husband, whom she wants to make shine, "suppose you tell them the story of your arrival in Paris—you know, your first affair in the Rue Soufflot."

Tom does not require encouragement pours himself out a little brandy to strengthen his voice, and tells how, some ten years since, returning from London utterly cleaned out, one last hundred sous piece in his pocket, he learns, though a former comrade he met in an English tavern near the station, that the agencies were at that moment occupied with a big affair, the marriage of Mademoiselle Beaujars, the daughter of the contractor—with twelve millions for a dowry—who had taken it into her head to marry a great nobleman, a genuine one. A magnificent commission was promised, and the bloodhounds on the track were numerous. Tom is not disconcerted, goes into a reading-room, turns over all the pedigrees of France, the *Almanac de Gotha*, the *Bottin Directory*, and at last discovers a very ancient family, allied to the most celebrated names, and living in the Rue Soufflot. The disproportion between the title and the name of the street indicated to him a decadence in the family, or a blemish. "On what floor is Monsieur the Marquis de X——?" He sacrifices his last silver coin, and obtains some information from the concierge. Certainly, a great noble, widower, a son just leaving Saint-Cyr, and a young lady of eighteen, very well brought up, "Two thousand francs rent, gas, water and carpet," adds the concierge, in whose eyes it all enhanced his tenant's dignity. "Just what I want," thinks J. Tom Levis; and he goes up, though all the same rather nervous at the prosperous look of the staircase, a statue at the entrance, arm-chairs on every landing, the luxury of a modern house, with which were very

strongly contrasted his worn-out cloths, his leaky shoes, and his extremely delicate commission.

"Half way up," related the agent, "I felt inclined to go down again. Then, upon my word, I found cheek enough to attempt the stroke. I said to myself: 'You have wit, aplomb, your livelihood to earn—all honour to brains.' And I went up four steps at a time. I was introduced into a big *salon*, which I very soon took stock of: two or three very fine antiques, some pompous debris, a portrait by Largilliere, much poverty underneath—the shabby sofa, the arm-chairs empty of stuffing, the chimney-piece colder than its own marble. The master of the house appears at last, a majestic old chap, very stylish, Samson in *Mademoiselle de la Seigliere*. 'You have a son, Monsieur le Marquis.' At the first words Samson gets up indignant. I mention the figure, twelve millions; he sits down and we talk. He begins by confessing that his fortune is not equal to his name—twenty thousand francs income at the most, and that he would not be sorry to regild his escutcheon anew. The son will have one hundred thousand francs dowry. 'Oh, Monsier le Marquis, the name will be enough.' Then we fix the price of my commission, and I go off in a great hurry, being expected at my office—good, my office; I didn't even know where I was going to sleep that night—but at the door the old man detains me, and, in a good-natured tone: 'Come now, you impress me as a smart fellow. I have something to propose to you. You ought to find a husband for my daughter also. She has no dowry, for, to tell you the truth, I was exaggerating just now when I mentioned an income of twenty thousand francs, it's less than half. But I can dispose of a title of Roman count for my son-in-law. Besides, if he is in army, my relationship with the Minister of War enables me to ensure an important promotion.' When I finished taking my notes, with a 'Rely on me, M. le Marquis,' and I was about to leave, a hand was laid flat on my shoulder. I turned round. Samson was looking at me and laughing, with such a droll air. 'And besides, there's me,' he said to me. 'What, Monsieur le Marquis?' 'By heavens, yes, I'm not yet too decrepit, and if I found the opportunity——' He ends by avowing that he is eaten up with debts, and not a halfpenny to pay them with. By George! my dear Mr Tom, if you can discover for me some worthy business lady with considerable savings, old maid or widow, send her to me with her money bags. I'll make

her a marquise.' When I left, my education was complete, I had learnt all that there was to be done in Parisian society; and the Levis Agency was practically founded."

It was a wonderful story as narrated, or rather played, by Tom Levis. He got up, sat down again, imitated the majestic manner of the old noble, which soon degenerated into a Bohemian cynicism, and his way of spreading his handkerchief between his knees when he crossed his legs, and his revelation in three instalments of the actual nullity of his resources. It might have been a scene from the *Neveu de Rameau*, only a Rameau's nephew of the nineteenth century, without power, without grace, without violence, with something hard, fierce, the harshness of intonation of the English bulldog, which had entered into the scoffing of the former loafer in the Faubourgs. The other laughed, were much amused, drew from Tom's recital philosophical and cynical reflections.

"You see, my cherubs" said old Leemans, "if dealers agreed among themselves they would be the masters of the world—everything is trafficked in the times in which we are living. Everything is bound to come to us, to pass through our hands, leaving us a little of its skin. When I think of the business done for the last forty years in this hole in the Rue Eginhard, of all I have melted, sold, patched up, exchanged—to complete it I had only to deal in a crown. Now it's there, it's in the bag.

He rose, glass in hand, his eyes brilliant and fierce.

"Here's to dealing, my children!"

Darnet, in the background, hidden under her black Cantal coif, watched everything, listened to everything, instructed herself about commerce; for she hoped to establish herself, as soon as "Monsieur" was dead, and deal in curios on her own account.

Suddenly the bell at the entrance shakes violently, wheezes like an old catarrh. They all start.

"Who'd come at such an hour, at such a time?"

"It's Lebeau," says the father; "it's only him."

Loud cry welcomes the *valet de chambre*, who had not been seen for a long time, and enters lived, haggard, his teeth clenched with the air of one absolutely upset, and in a bad temper.

"Sit down there, you old rascal," says Leemans, making room between himself and his daughter.

"The devil!" observes the other, noticing their flushed faces, the table, and the remains of the dinner. "It seems you're amusing yourselves here."

The remark, the funereal tone in which it is made—they all look at each other, rather uneasy. "By jove, yes, we are amusing ourselves!" We are merry! Why should we be gloomy?",

Monsieur Lebeau appears stopefied.

"What! don't you know? When did you see the King, comtesse?"

"Why, this morning—yesterday—every day."

"And he told you nothing about the dreadful scene?"

Then, in a few words, he recounted the scene, the burnt deed, the busiess itself very probably destroyed with it.

"The scoundrel! He's done me," cried Sephora.

Tom, very uneasy, looks into the depths of his wife's eyes. Had she by chance, had the imprudent weakness—? But the lady is not in the humour to give explanations; she is full of fury, of indignation against Christian, who has been for the last week entangling himself in a series of lies in order to explain how it is that the act of abdication is not yet signed. Oh, the coward! the coward and liar! But why did Lebeau not inform them?

"Ah, yes, why?" said valet, with his hideous smile. "It would have been confoundedly difficult to inform you. For the last ten days I have been running about—five hundred leagues without breathing time, without drawing rein—and not even the means of writing a letter, watched as I was by a dreadful monk, a Franciscan father, who plays with a knife like a bandit. He spied on all my movements, never left me a minute out of his eye, on the pretext that he did not know enough French to go alone and make himsself understood. The truth is, that they distrust me at Saint-Mande, and that they have profited by my absence to work up a big affair."

"What is it?" asked all their eyes.

"I believe it's all about an expedition to Dalmatia. It's that devil of a Gascon who has given them the swelled head. Oh! I said we ought to have got rid of that fellow right at the beginning."

In vain they tried to hide things from him, the *valet de chambre* had for some time scented preparations in the air, letters going off at all hours, mysterious counsels. One day, on opening an album of water-colours, which that little fool to a Rosen had left about, he saw designs of uniforms, costumes,

drawn by her : *Illyrian volunteers, dragoons of the faith, blue shirts, cuirassiers of the legitimate right.* Another day he overheard a serious discussion between the princess and Madam de Silvis about the form and size of the cockades. From all this, from those shreds of words, he inferred a big expedition ; and the journey he had just had to make was probably connectd with it. The little dark man, a kind of hunchback, whom he had been sent to fetch from the mountains of Navarre, must be some great warrior, commissioned to lead the army, under the King's orders.

"What ! is the King going too ?" shouts father Leemans, with a contemptuous glance at his daughter.

A tumult of words follows this exclamation.

"And our money ?"

"And the bills ?"

"It's an infamy ; it's a robbery !"

And as nowadays politics is the dish of *Æsop* which is mixed with everything, Pichery, very Imperialist, stiff as his buckram stock; apostrophises the public :

"Under the Empire such a thing could not have been done—to menace the tranquility of a neighbouring state."

"Quite sure," observes J. Tom Levis gravely—"quite sure that if they knew it at the Presidency it would not be allowed. We must warn them, bestir ourselves."

"Yes, I thought of that," rejoins Lebeau ; "unfortunately, I know nothing clear, precise. They wouldn't listen to me. And besides, those people yonder are on their guard—all their precautions are taken to avoid suspicions. So this evening is the Queen's birthday ; their is to be a grand *fete* at the Rosen's *hotel*. Well, go and tell the authorities that all those dancers are actually conspiring and making ready for fight! Still, there is something not ordinary about that ball."

Only then do they notice that the valet is in evening dress—dress shoes, white tie ; he manages the organising of the buffets over there, and must return very quickly to the Ile-Saint-Louis. Suddenly the countees, who has been reflecting for some moments, observed :

"Listen, Lebeau : if the King goes away, you will know it, won't you ? You will be informed of it, even if it were only to pack up his baggage. Well, let me be informed an hour beforehand, and I swear to you the expedition shall not take place."

She spoke with her calm voice, with slow but firm decision,

And while J. Tom Levis dreamily asks himself how Sephora could prevent the King from going ; whilst the other partners, quite crestfallen, calculate what the failure of the affair would cost them ; Master Lebeau, returning to the ball, hastens along on the tips of his pumps, across the labyrinth of small, dark streets, with old roofs, escutcheoned doors all that quarter—aristocratic in the last century, but now transformed into factories, into workshops—which, shaken all day by heavy waggons and the swarming of a poor population, resumes at night its character of a curious dead city.

The *fete* could be heard and seen from afar ; it was a summer *fete*, a night *fete*, sending over both banks of the Seine widespread echoes, whilst the lights poured out like the red mist of a fire at that extremity of the island which, jutting out into the waves, resembled the lofty rounded poop of a gigantic ship at anchor. On approaching, one distinguished the high windows shining under the hangings, the thousand coloured lights in girandoles, attached to the bushes, to the ancient trees of the garden, and on the Quai d'Anjou, generally asleep at that hour, the lamps of the carriages piercing the night with their little motionless beacons. Since Herbert's marriage, the Hotel Rosen had not seen similar *fete*, and the present one was even on a larger scale than the former, all the windows and doors being opened to the splendour of the starry night.

The ground floor formed a long gallery of connected *salons*, high as a cathedral, adorned with paintings, with antique buildings, where the lustres of Holland and Venice, the lanterns of mosques, hanging from the ceilings, lit up a strange decoration : hangings quivering with reflections of green and red, old, heavy shrines of massive silver, carved ivories in frames, old mirrors with blackened faces, reliquaries, standards, treasures from Montenegro and Herzegovina, which Parisian taste had been able to group, to gather together, without anything loud or too exotic, the band, arranged on the tribune of an ancient oratory, recalling that of Chenonceaux, was surrounded by oriflammes sheltering arm-chairs reserved for the Queen and for the King ; and, in contrast with all this antiquity, those splendid antiques reflected everywhere, which would have delighted father Leemans. The whirling waltzes of the day were being danced, waltzes with long embroidered trains, with brilliant fixed eyes, in the vapour of crinkled hair, passing, like a challenge of exuberant youth, with blond,

slender, floating visions and brunette apparitions of a creamy pallor. From time to time, out of this network of dancers, this medley of silky stuffs, which adds to the music of balls a mysterious and coquettish whispering, a couple would detach themselves, pass through the lofty French window, receive upon their receding heads the white light of the pediment, where the Queen's cypher figured, appeared in flaming gas, and, continuing in the alleys of the garden the rhythm of the dance, with a hesitation, with halts, caused by the distance of the sounds, would turn their waltz at last into a cadenced walk, a harmonious promenade along the balmy bushes of magnolias and roses. In fact, apart from the uncommonness, the rarity of the scene, a few foreign types of women, with wild hair, with the soft suppleness of Slavonians, there was at first sight nothing but one of those fashionable routs such as the Faubourg Saint-Germain, represented at the Hotel Roser by its most ancient, its most pompous names, sometimes given in its old gardens in the Rue de l'Universite, where the dancers pass from waxed floors to the lawns, where the black coat may be enlivened by light trousers, open-air *fetes* belonging to the summer, and freer, more exuberant than other.

In his room on the second floor the old duke, a prey to an attack of sciatica during the past week, listened to the echoes of his ball, stifling under his blankets cries of pain and barrack-room oaths about the ironical cruelty of the illness that nailed him to his bed on such a day, made it impossible for him to join those fine young people who were to start next day. The word of command having been given, the posts in the combat selected, this ball was a good-bye, a sort of bravado to the ill chances of war, as well as a precaution against the inquisitiveness of the French police. If the duke could not accompany the volunteers, he consoled himself by thinking his son Herbert would be in the affair, and his gold coins also, since their Majesties had graciously allowed him to defray the expenses of the expedition. On his bed, mixed with ordnance maps, with strategical plans, were bills for stores, cases of guns, boots, blankets, provisions for the campaign, which he carefully checked with terrible twistings of his moustaches, the heroic grimace of the Royalist struggling against his parsimonious skinflint instincts. Sometimes a number, a piece of information was lacking, then he sent for Herbert—a pretext of keeping by him for a few minutes the big son who was to

leave him to-morrow for the first time, whom he perhaps would never see again, and for whom he felt an immense affection, all dissembled beneath a stately, reserved manner. But the prince did not remain long, being in a hurry to go down again to do the honours of the *hotel*, and, above all, not wishing to lose any of the brief hours which he still might spend near his dear Colette.

Standing with him in the first *salon*, she helped him receive his father's guests, prettier, more elegant than ever, whose close-fitted in a tunic of old lace made of the alb of a Greek bishop, whose creamy tint well framed her fragile beauty, impressed this evening by an almost grave air of mystery. It quietened her features, deepened her eyes, with the same blue as the little cockade sporting among her curls, beneath a diamond aigrette—hush! a cockade for an Illyrian volunteer, a model adopted for the expedition and designed by the princess. Ah, during the last three months she had not remained inactive, the dear little woman! Copying proclamations, carrying them secretly to the Convent of the Franciscans, designing costumes, banners, putting the police off the scent, whom she believed to be always at her heels, it was thus she supported the role of a royalist great lady, inspired by her former reading at the *Secre-Cœur*. One detail only was wanting in the programme of Vendean brigandage: she could not go away, follow her Herbert. Because now it was Herbert, nothing but Herbert; by the beneficence of nature, she no more thought about the other than about the unfortunate marmoset, who was cruelly crushed on the neighbouring pavement. The delight of putting on a man's costume and wearing small jack-boots was refused Colette for two reasons: one, her duties in respect to the Queen; the other, quite intimate, whispered the evening before in the aide-de-camp's ear. Yes, if it was not elusion, in a space of time he easily calculated, the race of the Rosens would count one more little representative, and they could not expose a hope so dear, so precious, to the fatigues of an expedition which would not end without some rough and bloody sword-thrusts, any more than it was thought proper to take a turn of the waltz through the splendid *salons*. So there were many secrets for the little woman to keep, and, notwithstanding the mystery of her lips, her adorably tell-tale eyes, the languid fashion in which she leant on Herbert's arm, told it all for her.

Suddenly the orchestra is silent, the dance is stopped; everyone stands up for the entry of Christian and Frederique. They have crossed the three *salons*, glittering with national treasures, where the Queen could see everywhere her cypher embroidered with flowers, lights, jewellery, where everything had spoken to them of their country, of its glories. And now they stop on the threshold of the garden, never has monarchy been represented in a prouder more, brilliant manner; truly, a couple to imprint on the coinage of a people, on the pediment of a dynasty. The Queen especially is admirable, looking ten years younger in a splendid white dress, and on her shoulders, as her sole jewel, a heavy amber necklace, from which hangs a cross. Offered and blessed by the Pope, this necklace has its legend, with the faithful relate in a low voice. Frederique wore it the whole time of the siege of Ragusa; twice it was lost and miraculously recovered in the sorties under fire. She holds a superstition about it, has made a queenly vow in connection with it, without troubling about the charming effect of those gilded pearls so near her hair, of which, as it were, they catch the reflection.

While the sovereigns are there, standing up radiant, admiring the *fete* and the sight of the garden, illuminated like a fairy land, three notes, bizarre, stirring, full of energy, suddenly come from a violin among a mass of rhododendrons. The whole Slav soul in the gathering quivers on recognising the sound of the guzlas. They began with a lively prelude, an overflow of distant war sounds, which advances, soars, swells, spreads. It was like a heavy cloud, laden with electricity, which, from time to time, was scored with lightning by a more lively note of the bow, and from which soon poured forth the stormy, voluptuous, heroic rhythm of the National Air, at once hymn and dance, of that air of Rodoitza, which is a part of all the *fetes*, all the battles over yonder, and represents well the double character of its ancient legend. The Heiducque, Rodoitza, fallen into the hands of the Turks, feigns death to escape. They light a fire on his chest; the Heiducque does not move. They slip a serpent into his bosom, irritated by the sun. They bury twenty nails under his nails he preserves his stony immobility. Then they bring Haikouna, the tallest, loveliest girl in Zara, who begins to dance whilst singing the delirious National Air. At the first notes, when Rodoitza hears the clinking of the sequins of the fair one's necklace, the shaking of the fringes of her girdle.

he smiles, opens his eyes, would be lost, did not the dancer, with one bound, throw over his expressive face the silken foulard with which she marks and crowns her dance. So the Heiduke was saved, and that is why for two hundred years the National Air of Illyria is called the air of Eodoitza.

Hearing it resound under the sky of exile, all the Illyrians, men and women, grow pale. These young men, hardy and proud, with the figures of Heidukes, all feel in themselves the indomitable courage of Roditza, so well rewarded by a woman's love; those beautiful Dalmatians, tall as Haikouna, have in their hearts her tenderness for the heroes. The old men, thinking of their distant country, the mothers watching their sons, all feel inclined to sob, all—were it not for the presence of the King and Queen—would mingle their voices with the loud strident cry which the guzla players at the end of their piece, hurl up to the stars in a last clash of cords.

Immediately after the dances are resumed with surprising enthusiasm for a world in which one scarcely amuses oneself, except as a figure of speech. As Lebeau said, there is certainly something which is not ordinary in this festivity—something ardent, feverish, passionate, which one feels in the embrace of arms around waists, the spiritedness of the dancers, certain sparkling glances that cross, even in the cadence of the waltzes, the mazurkas, in which something suddenly sounds like a clinking of stirrups and spurs. Towards the end of balls in general, when morning pales the windows, the last hour of pleasure has this eager haste, these intoxicated raptures; here, however, the ball hardly begins, and already all hands burn within the gloves, all hearts beat beneath the flowers of the bodice, or the little diamond brooches; and when a couple passes by, melting with rhythm and with love, long looks follow them, smiling, soft with affection—everyone, in fact, knows that all those fine dancers, the nobility of Illyria, exiled with their princes, French nobility, ever ready to shed its blood in a good cause, are about to start at dawn on a bold and dangerous expedition. Even in the event of victory, how many of those proud young men, who enrol without counting their numbers, will return? How many, before a week is past, will bite the dust, lying on the mountains, their ears still ringing with the intoxicating tune of the mazurka, whilst their blood is flowing away? It is the approach of danger that mingles the anxiety of a vigil under arms with the spiritedness of the ball, makes tears, bright glances flash in the

eyes with so much boldness, and so much languor. What can be refused to a man who is going away, who is perhaps about to perish? And this Death hovering, whose wing brushes you in the cadence of the violins, how it draws, embraces closer and precipitates confessions! fugitive loves, a meeting of ephemera crossing the same sunbeam! They never saw each other before; doubtless they will not see each other again and behold two hearts enchained! Some women, the more haughty, try to smile despite their emotion; but beneath that irony how much sweetness there is! And the whole crowd turns about, foreheads thrown back, curls fluttering, each couple thinking itself alone, shut off, dazed, in the magic of a waltz of Brahms or a mazurka of Chopin.

One who was also vibrating, much moved, was Meraut, in whom the song of the guzlas awoke the Bohemian adventurous temper, which lies at the bottom of all Southern temperaments. He, who did not dance, and who would not fight, was overcome by the enchantment of this heroic ball; and to consider that all these youths were about to start, to shed their blood, while he remained with the old men, the children, caused inexpressible melancholy, discomfort. Idea was shamed by action. And perhaps Frederique's radiant pride, as she leaned on Christian's arm, had something to do with his depression—his wish for death inspired by the Slav songs and dances. How happy she was at finding again the king, the warrior, in her husband! Haikouna, at the sound of arms you can forget everything, forgive everything, treachery, lying; what you love above all is physical courage, it is always to that you will throw the handkerchief, warm with your tears or the light perfumes of your face—and whilst he is thus desolate, she, who has just noticed in a corner of the drawing-room, that broad poet's brow, over which fall the abundant tresses in rebellious, unfashionable style, Haikouna smiles, signs to him to approach. You would say she guessed the reason of his sadness.

"What a fine *fete*, Monsieur Meraut."

Then, lowering her voice:

"I owe you this too, but we owe you so much, we don't know how to thank you"

Just then Christian II. approaches, takes again Frederique's arm:

"The Marquis de Hezeta is here," he says to Elysee; "have you seen him?"

"I don't know him, sire."

"He claims, however, you're old friends. Look, there he is."

This Marquis de Hezeta was the chief who, in the absence of the old General de Rosen, was to command the expedition. He had shown in the Duke de Palma's last attempt astonishing qualities as a commander, and never, had he been listened to, would it have ended so pitifully. When he saw his efforts were useless, and the pretender himself gave the example and signal for flight, he threw himself, in his disappointment and weariness, into the depths of the Basque mountains, lived there, far from childish conspiracies, false expectations, sword-thrusts in the water, that exhausted his moral forces. He wanted to die obscure in his own country, but was to be once more tempted to adventure by the persuasive royalism of Father Alohee and the renown of Christian II.'s bravery. His old nobility of family, his romantic life, composed of exiles, persecutions, brilliant strokes, his fanatical cruelties, surrounded the Marquis Jose Maria de Hezeta with an almost legendary interest, made him the lion of the evening.

"Good day, Ely," advancing to Elysee, hand outstretched, and calling him by his boyhood's name. "Eh, yes, it's me; it's your old master, Monsieur Papel."

The evening dress, laden with crosses and orders, the white cravat, hardly altered him, nor even the twenty years that had passed over that enormous dwarf's head, so burnt by gunpowder and the harsh weather of the mountains that his frontal vein, terrifying and characteristic, could hardly be seen. With it seemed to have diminished his Royalist enthusiasm.

Elysee was strangely surprised to hear his old master speak, he who had made him what he was.

"You see, my little Eye"—little Ely was two feet taller than he, and had not a few grey hairs—"it's all over, there are no more kings; the principle stands, but the men are lacking. Not one of those dismounted men is capable of placing himself in the saddle again, not one even who has a real desire to do so. Ah! what I saw, what I saw during that war!"

A bloody mist rose to his forehead, reddened his eyes, staring as if enlarged by a vision of shame, cowardice, treachery.

"But all kings are not the same," protested Meraut, "and I'm certain that Christian——"

"Yours is worth no more than ours—a child, an idler—not

an idea, no will in those eyes of pleasure ; but just look at him."

He pointed to the King, who entered waltzing, his eyes swimming, his forehead damp, his small, round head bent over his partner's bare shoulder, moistening it with his open lips, showing an inclination to wallow in it. In the increasing intoxication of the ball, the pair passed near them without seeing them, touched them with their panting breath ; and as the gallery filled with people looking at the dancing of Christian II., the best dancer in his kingdom, Hezeta and Meraut took refuge in the deep embrasure of one of the windows looking on the Quai d'Anjou. They remained there a long time, half way between the noise and whirlwind of the ball and the fresh shade, the calming silence of the night.

"Kings no longer have faith, kings no longer have any will. Why should we excite ourselves for them ?" said the Spaniard, savagely.

"You no longer believe in them, and yet you're going ?"

"I'm going."

"Without hope ?"

"One only—that of getting my head broken, my poor head, which I no longer know where to lay."

"And the King ?"

"Oh, that man, I'm quite calm about him."

Did he mean that Christian II. was not yet on horseback, or that, like his cousin, the Duke de Palma he would always know how so return safe from battle ? He did not explain himself further. Around them the ball continued to whirl in mad circlings, but Elysee now beheld it through the discouragement of his old master and his own disillusion.

Chapter Ten

THE NIGHT TRAIN

"We start to-night at eleven from the Gare de Lyon, destination unknown—probably Cette, Nice, or Marseilles. Write."

When this note, rapidly pencilled by Lebeau, reached the Rue de Messine, the Countess de Spalato had just left her bath, and all fresh, sweet-smelling and supple, was busy between her room and her boudoir, watering, looking herself after her flowers—her basket-flowers, her green plants—light

suede gloves up to the elbow for this promenade through her artificial garden. She was not moved, but remained a moment to reflect in the quiet, half light of the lowered blinds, then she gave a little decided gesture, a shrugging of the shoulders, which meant : "Bah ! who wants the end—" and quickly she rang for her maid, that she might be under arms when the King came.

"What is madame going to put on ?"

Madame looked at the glass to ask it for an idea.

"Nothing ; I shall remain as I am."

Nothing indeed could have made her prettier than the long, clinging, pale flannel gown, with its soft folds, a big fichu knotted in childlike style behind her waist, and her black hair twisted, curled, raised very high, revealing the nape and the beginning of the line of the shoulders, which one guessed to have a livelier tone than the face, the warm, smooth clearness of amber.

She thought, rightly that no toilet would equal this dish-*abille*, which accentuated the simple, girlish air which the King liked so much in her ; but it obliged her to lunch in her room, for she could not go down to the dining-room in such a costume. She had put her household on the footing of respectability, and there was no room here for the fantasticality, the Bohemian ways of Courbevoie. After lunch, she installed herself in her boudoir which a covered verandah prolonged over the avenue, and began watching for the King ; quietly seated, all pink in the reflection of the blinds, just as formerly at the middle-class window at the family hotel. Christian never came before two ; but after that hour began an anguish quite new to that placid nature, the anguish of waiting, at first hardly quivering, like a ripple on water about to boil, the feverish, agitated, boiling over. Carriages were rare at that hour in the quiet avenue, with its double rows of sunlit plane trees, and of new *hotels*, ending in the gilded gates, the brightened lamp posts of the Parc Monceau. At the least sound of wheels, Sephora drew aside the blind to see better, and, her expectation constantly deceived, was exasperated by the luxurious serenity of the outside world, of that provincial calm.

What had happened ? Would he really go away without seeing her ? She sought for reasons, pretexts ; but when one waits everything waits, the entire being remains in suspense, and the ideas, fluttering, incoherent, are no more finished than

the words stammering on the edge of the lips. The countess felt this torture, and that faint feeling in which all the nerves are strained and exhausted. Again she raised the pink blind. A warm wind was shaking the branches in green tufts, a freshness rose up from the road, which was inundated by the sharp, quick jets of watercarts, interrupted continually by the passing carriages, now more numerous, going to the Bois de Boulogne for the five o'clock drive. Then she began to be seriously frightened at the King's desertion; sent off two letters, one to the Prince d'Axel, the other to the club; then she dressed, as she could not remain till the evening like a little girl who has just got out of a bath, and again began her walk from her room to her boudoir, to her dressing-room, soon through the whole *hotel*, trying to believe she was not waiting by moving about. It was not a little cocotte cage she had bought, the Spalato, nor yet one of those overwhelming houses with which millionaires have encumbered the new quarters of the Parisian west end, but an artistic *hotel*, well worthy of the names of the surrounding streets—Murillo, Velasquez, Vandyck—and which was different in everything from its neighbours, from the top of its facade to the knocker on the door. Built by Count Potnicki for his mistress—an ugly woman, whom he paid every morning with a thousand-franc note, folded in four, on the toilet table—this wonderful mansion had been sold hurriedly for two millions with its artistic furniture, on the death of the rich Pole, who left no will, and Sephora had bought it and all those treasures at one stroke.

The Countess de Spalato descends to the *salons* of the ground floor by the massive staircase of carved wood, whose banisters would support a carriage and pair, and which gives the lady's grave beauty the dark background of a Dutch picture. As a rule, her heart exults amid her beautiful possessions, still more embellished by the good bargain she made; to-day she comes and goes without looking, without seeing, her thoughts far away, lost in irritating reasonings. "What! he would go off like that! So he did not love me!" She who fancied she had so thoroughly captivated, netted him!

The servant returns. No news of the King. He has not been seen anywhere. It was just like Christian. Knowing himself weak, he fled, took himself off. A fit of mad rage for a moment carries away out of her clam this woman who is so selfpossessed. Were it not for her long habit of trade, she would break, smash up everything around her. Throwing

herself in an arm-chair, whilst the ending day obscures all her wealth of yesterday, she sees it fly, leave her together with her dream of colossal fortunes. The door opens violently.

"Madame la Comtesse is served."

She has to sit at table all by herself in the stately dining-room, its light panels crowded with portraits by Frans Hals, valued at a hundred thousand francs—severe, pale, stiff and solemn faces in their high ruffles, not so solemn, however, as the white-cravated butler who carves at the side table the dishes which are served by two impassive footmen dressed in nankeen. The irony of this pompous service, in contrast with the desertion threatening Madam de Spalato, wrings her heart with chagrin; and it might be thought the servants suspect something, so much do the valets reinforce their ceremonious disdain whilst she eats—waiting till she has finished, motionless and grave as a photographer's assistants after fixing the customer in front of the camera. Gradually, however, the deserted woman cheers up, returns to her true self. No; she won't let herself be cast off like that. It is not that she holds to the King, but the business, the grand *comp*, all her self-love in regard to her partners, are at stake. Come, now, she has decided on a move. Going up to her room, she writes a word to Tom; then, whilst the servants in the basement are dining and discussing their mistress's lonely and agitated day, Madam la Comtesse prepares, with her not unskilful little hands, a travelling bag, which has often journeyed between the Agency and Courbevoie, throws the grey woollen cloak over her shoulders to protect her against the cold night air, and stealthily leaves her palace, going on foot to the nearest cabstand, holding her little bag just like a lady's companion who has had summary notice.

Christian II., on his side, had not spent a less unquiet day. Remaining at the ball very late with the Queen, he awoke with his head and heart filled with the heroic burdens of the guzlas. The preparations for the journey, the inspection of his arms, as well as the lieutenant-general's costume he had not worn since Ragusa, took him up to eleven o'clock, attended, watched by the very perplexed Lebeau, who did not venture to push too far his insinuations of inquiry. At eleven the little court assembled to assist at a Low Mass pronounced by Father Alpee in the drawing room, transformed into an oratory, the mantelpiece serving as an altar, its velvet drapery covered by an embroidered cloth. The Rosens were not there

—the old man in bed, the princess having accompanied Herbert to the station, who had gone off with some young men. Hezeta was to follow by the next train, and all the small band was to dribble out thus during the day, in order not to give the alarm. This secret Mass, which recalled the days of disaster, the monk's enthusiastic face, the military energy of his gesture and voice, had an effect of incense and powder—the religious ceremony solemnised by the approaching battle.

The lunch was oppressed by these mingled emotions, although the King affected a certain coquetry in not leaving any but agreeable recollections behind him, although he adopted towards the Queen a respectfully affectionate attitude, which was chilled by Frederique's rather mistrustful behaviour. The child watched them timidly, for the horrible scene of that other night haunted his young memory, and left him nervous intuitions above his age. The Marquise de Silvis heaved deep sighs of adieu in advance. As for Elysee, to whom confidence had returned, he could not contain his joy, thinking of that counter-revolution by the people he had so long dreamt of, of that insurrection, forcing the gates of a palace to restore a king. Success did not seem doubtful to him. Christian had not the same certainty; but, apart from that slight uneasiness of departure, when it seems as if a solitude was suddenly created, a premature separation from the objects or beings surrounding you, he felt no ominous apprehension, rather a relief from his most false position, surrounded as he was by threatening money matters, by debts of honour. In case of victory the civil list would pay everything. Defeat, on the contrary, would bring a general collapse—death, a bullet through his forehead, as he faced the enemy. He thought of it as of a definite solution of his money and heart difficulties; and his carelessness did not figure badly between the Queen's preoccupations and Elysee's enthusiasm. But while they were talking together in the garden, a servant happened to pass.

"Tell Samy to have the carriage ready," ordered Christian.

Frederique started.

"You're going out?"

"Yes, as a matter of caution. Yesterday's ball must have made Paris talk. I must show myself, be seen at the club on the boulevard. Oh, I shall come back to dinner with you."

He ran up the steps, joyous and free, like a schoolboy leaving a classroom.

"I shall be afraid till the end," said the Queen; and Meraut, knowing what he did, found not a word to encourage her.

Notwithstanding, the King had taken strong resolutions. During Mass he had sworn to himself never to see his Sephora again, feeling assured that if she wanted to detain him, if she firmly clasped her arms around his neck, he would not have the strength to quit her. So, with the best faith in the world, he had himself driven to his club, found there some bald-heads absorbed in silent games of whist and some majestic slumberers around the big table in the reading-room. Everything was here the more dead and deserted, as there had been a lot of play the previous night. In the morning, as the whole club set were going out, Monseigneur le Prince d'Axel at their head, a number of she-asses passed before the club, jingling their bells as they trotted. Monseigneur had sent for the ass keeper. They had drunk warm milk in champagne glasses, then these gentlemen, all a trifle intoxicated, mounting the poor animals, in spite of their kicks and the driver's shouts, rode the most amusing steeplechase all along the Rue de la Paix. You should have heard the tale, the Majestically affected tale of Monsieur Bonceil, the manager of the Grand Club.

"Oh, it was so funny! Monseigneur on that little she-ass, obliged to roll up his long legs, for Monseigneur has wonderful legs—and all the time his imperturbable coolness—ah, if his Majesty had been there!"

His Majesty was very sorry to have missed that amusing mad escapade. Lucky Prince d'Axel! at variance with the King, his uncle, hounded out of his country by all sorts of court intrigues, perhaps he would never reign, because the old monarch talked of marrying again—some young woman—and begetting a crowd of little Presumptives. But all that did not disquiet him in the least degree. To go to the pace in Paris seemed to him far more interesting than to go in for politics at home. And gradually the spirit of brag and jeering again seized hold of Christian, as he lay stretched on the sofa, where the Crown Prince had left the mark of his contagious idleness. In the lazy atmosphere of the club, the heroic enthusiasm of the night before, and the morrow's expedition, appeared to the young King without glory, without magic, and without greatness. He grew positively unstrung by stopping there; and in order to escape that torpor which penetrated

every vein like a stupefying poison, he got up, went into the open air among living, active, moving beings.

Three o'clock—the hour at which he usually went off to the Avenue de Messine, after lunching at the club, or at Mignon's. His foot steps mechanically took the usual direction of that summer part of Paris, rather larger, a trifle less heady than the other, but which makes up such charming views, such fine perspectives, with its green massed against stone and the shadows of foliage on the whiteness of the asphalt.

What a number of pretty women gliding under them, half concealed by their sunshades, with such grace, such charming seductiveness and good-humour! What other women knew how to walk like them, drape themselves like these in their actual appearance and manner, and talk and dress and do the opposite so well? Ah, Paris, Paris, city of easy pleasure, of brief hours! To think that in order to be surer of losing all this, he was perhaps about to get his head broken. Yet, what a good time, what intelligent and complete voluptuousness he had enjoyed!

In the favour of his gratitude, the Salv had a sparkle in his eyes for all those passing women, who fascinated him by a feature, by a sweep of the skirt, bordered with lace, fan fashion. It was a far cry from the king-knight, who in the morning, between his wife and his son, bent in the oratory, before starting for the conquest of his kingdom, to this pretty lady-killer, nose in the air, his conquering hat on his little curly round head, with his cheeks reddened by a fever of pleasure. Frederique was not wrong in cursing the ferment of Paris, in dreading it for that vacillating brain.

At the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann and the Avenue de Messine, Christian stopped and let several carriages go by. He was recalled to reason. How had he come there, and so quickly? The Hotel Potnicki lifted up in a vaporous sunset its two turrets, its balcony draped like an alcove—what a temptation—why shouldn't he go there? Why shouldn't he see for the last time that woman who was to remain in his life, with the dry, parching memory of an ungratified desire?

At last, after a terrible minute's struggle, the hesitation very visible in the reed-like swaying of all that weak body, he made a heroic decision, jumped into an open cab which was passing, and gave the club address. Never would he have had that courage without the oath to God taken in the morning during Mass; for that pusillanimous, Catholic-woman soul, this triumphant

phed over everything. At the club he found Sephora's letter, which communicated to him the fever with which she burnt, merely by the musk smell of the paper. The prince handed him the other note—a few hurried, imploring phrases, in a handwriting which Tom's ledger had never known. But here Christian II., surrounded, sustained, observed, felt himself stronger, being of those for whom the gallery forms an attitude. He crumpled the letters in his pocket. The gilded youth were arriving, still impressed by the story of the she-asses, related at length in a morning paper. The sheet circulated from hand to hand, and whilst reading it they all indulged in that worn-out laugh, that belly-laugh of people who are utterly dissipated.

"Is there going to be some fun to-night?" inquired these young noblemen, as they absorbed sodas, the mineral waters of which the club kept a whole storeful.

Seduced by their jovial mood, the King agreed to dine with them at the Cafe de Londres, not in one of the rooms—whose well-known hangings had often danced before their drunken eyes, whose mirrors bore their names, written, crossed, mixed up like a wintry rime on the panes—but in the cellars, those wonderful catacombs of barrels and bottles, stretching out underground their long lines of bins, marked with porcelain labels, as far as the Opera Comique. All the vintages of France slept there. The table had been laid at the end among the Chateau Yquem—Wattelet's idea, who wanted to distinguish by an eccentric meal the departure of Christian II., known only to himself and the prince. But the effect was missed by the dampness of the walls and ceilings, which soon chilled the guests, fatigued by the previous night. Queue-de-Poule went to sleep and awoke by starts. Rigolo spoke little, laughed, or pretended to, pulled out his watch every five minutes. Perhaps he was thinking of the Queen, who was bound to be frightened by the delay.

At desert, some women came—diners at the Cafe de Londres—who, knowing the Princes were below, left their tables and, directed by the waiters carrying candelabras, crept into the cellars, skirt on arm, with little cries, frightened airs. Nearly all were *decolletees*. After five minutes they coughed, grew pale, shivered on the gentlemen's knees, who themselves were at least sheltered by their turned-up coat collars. "Enough to give them all consumption," as one of them said, more fragile or less dare-devil than the others. It

was decided to go and take coffee upstairs in the saloons, and during the move, Christian vanished. It was hardly nine. His brougham was waiting at the door.

"Avenue de Messine," he said in a low voice, teeth clenched.

It had just taken him like a madness. During the whole dinner, he had seen only her—her—breathing in his possession of her in the naked flesh of the women who touched him. Oh! to seize that woman completely in his arms, to be no longer the dupe of her tears, of her prayers!

"Madame is out."

It was a cold douche on a brazier. Madame was out! He put no more questions, and, suddenly sobered, realised the bottomless abyss into which he had nearly fallen—a perjurer to God, traitor to the crown! The little rosary was under his burning fingers. He dribbled out Aves in thanksgivings, whilst the carriage rolled towards Saint-Mande, through the fantastic views and nocturnal terrors of the wood.

"The King!" exclaimed Elysee, who was watching at the drawing-room windows, and saw the two lamps of the brougham flash into the courtyard. The King! It was the first word uttered since dinner. All faces cleared up as by magic, tongues were loosened. The Queen herself, notwithstanding her seeming calm, her strength of character, could not restrain a cry of joy. She had imagined everything lost, Christian detained by that woman, abandoning his friends, disgracing himself for ever. And there was no one around her, during those three mortal hours of waiting, who had not had the same thought, who was not disquieted in the same way, even to little Zara, whom she had kept up, and who, understanding the anguish, the drama of that silence, without venturing one of those questions, so cruel, so fateful, which a child utters in a loud voice, had sheltered himself behind the leaves of a big album, whence his pretty head suddenly arose at the announcement of the King, a face bathed with streaming tears, which had been flowing silently during an hour. Later, when asked about his great grief, he admitted he was so despairing because he feared the King would go away without kissing him. Loving little soul, to whom this young, witty, smiling father seemed a big, rollicking brother, a big, fascinating brother, who, however, distressed their mother.

Christian's voice was heard, curt and hurried, giving orders. Then he went up into his room, and five minutes after

appeared equipped for the voyage in a small hat with a coquettish buckle and blue band, neat-fitting gaiters, like a seaside tourist in Wattelet's pictures. The monarch, nevertheless, penetrated beneath the dandy—the air of authority, greatness, the ease of figuring nobly in every possible situation. He approached the Queen, murmured some excuses for his delay.

Still pale with emotion, she whispered to him :

"If you had not come, I intended to go with Zara to take your place."

He well knew she did not lie, saw her for a moment, child on arm, amid bullets, just as on the balcony during their fearful scene, and the little one sheltering his beautiful eyes, resigned to death. Without answering, he carried Frederique's hand to his lips fervently ; then, with an impetuous, youthful impulse, drew her towards him :

"Forgive me !—forgive me !"

Forgive ! The Queen would have been quite capable of it, but she noticed at the door of the *salon*, ready to go off with his master, Lebeau, the rascally valet, the confident of his pleasures and treasons ; and all at once a dreadful idea came to her, while she gently freed herself :

"If he lied—if he were not going !"

Christian guessed it, and, turning to Meraut :

"You will accompany me to the station. Samy will bring you back."

Then, as the time was short, he hastened the adieux, said a pleasant word to each, to Boscovich, to the Marquise, took Zara on his knee, spoke to him of the expedition he was engaged in to recover his kingdom, bidding him never to give the Queen cause for pain, and if he did not see his father again, to remember he died for his country, doing his duty as a king—a little speech *a la* Louis XIV., really quite well turned, to which the little prince listened gravely, somewhat disconcerted by the seriousness of the words coming from a mouth which he had always seen smiling. But Christian was the creature of the present moment, of an excessive vacillation and fickleness, now absorbed in his departure, in the hazards of the expedition, and more touched than he wanted to appear, which very soon demolished the tender mood of the last minute. He waved an "Adieu ! adieu !" to everybody, with a deep bow to the Queen, and left.

Verily, if Elysee Meraut had not known the happening in the royal household for the last three years, worried by Christian II.'s weaknesses, shameful cowardices, he would have been unable to recognise the Rigolo of the Grand Club in the heroic and proud prince who laid before him his plans, his political views, so wide and so broad, as they were driving rapidly to the Gare de Lyon.

While Lebeau took the tickets, registered the luggage, they strolled up and down the big waiting-room, and, in the solitude of this departure by night, the King could not help thinking of Sephora, of the tender good-byes at the Gare Saint-Lazare. Under the impression of these memories, a woman passing drew his glance : the same figure, a touch of that firm and coquettish walk.

Poor Christian, poor king in his own despite !

Here he is at last in a carriage, whose door Lebeau holds open—an ordinary carriage, so as not to invite suspicions. He throws himself in a corner, in a hurry to be finished with it, to be at a distance. This slow separation is very painful to him. The engine whistles, the train moves, stretches to its full length, dashes noisily over bridges, through the sleeping suburbs studded with long lines of lamps, plunges into the open country. Christian II. breathes again ; he feels strong, safe, sheltered ; he would almost hum an air if he were alone in his carriage. But at the opposite window, a little shadowy figure in black shrinks modestly in the corner, with the manifest idea of avoiding notice. It is a woman. Young ? old ? ugly ? pretty ? The King—a matter of habit—casts a glance. Nothing budges but the two wings of a little toque, which turn back, have the look of folding for sleep. "She is asleep ; let's do like her." He stretches himself out, wraps himself in a rug, looks out vaguely at the confused silhouettes of trees and bushes, woolly in the shadow, which seem to throw themselves on each other as the train passes the signal posts, the clouds wandering wildly in a warm sky ; and his eyelids become heavy, are about to close, when he feels on his face the caress of soft hair, lowered eyelashes, a breath of violets, two lips murmuring on his lips :

"Naughty !—without saying good-bye !"

Ten hours after, Christian II. awoke to the boom of common, to the blinding light of a beautiful country seen tempered by murmuring verdure. He was just dreaming that at the head of his troops and under a storm of grapeshot, he

was climbing the ascent leading from the harbour of Ragusa to the citadel. But he found himself lying motionless in a large bed, ravined like a battlefield, eyes and brain confused, his very marrow melting in a delicious fatigue. What had happened? Gradually he remembered. He was at Fontainebleau, at the Hotel du Faisan, facing the forest, whose dense green tops you could see rising in the blue; the cannon came from artillery practice. And the living reality, the visible bond of his ideas, Sephora, sitting before the eternal writing-desk, which is only found now in hotels, was energetically writing with a bed, scratchy nib.

She saw in the mirror the King's admiring, grateful look, and replied to it without stirring, without turning, by a tender kiss of the eyes, at the end of the pen, then began again writing quietly, showing the smile in the corner of her seraphic mouth:

"A wire I'm sending home to reassure my people," she said, rising; and, the telegram given, the waiter gone, relieved of an anxiety, she opened the window to the white sun which poured in like water from a sluice. "Heavens! how fine it is!"

She went and sat on the edge of the bed near her lover. She laughed: she was wild with delight at being in the country, at rambling through the woods on this wonderful day. They had time—till the night train which had brought them and would carry off Christian the next night; for Lebeau, continuing his journey, was to warn Hezeta and his gentlemen that the landing was put off a day. The amorous Slav himself would have liked to have drawn the great curtains over a happiness he would have made last till the final hour, till the final minute. Women, however, are more idealistic; and immediately after lunch, a hired landau carried them through the splendid avenues, bordered with regular lawns, with trees in quincunxes that make the forest open like a Versailles park, before the rocks divide it into superb, savage sites. It was the first time they went out together, and Christian revelled in that brief joy, with its frightful morrow of battle and of death.

They drove under huge arches of verdure, where fell the foliage of the beeches, light, motionless, barely pierced by a distant sun, in terraces of an antediluvian development. Beneath the shelter, without other horizon than the profile of a beloved woman, without other memory or desire than her

caresses, the Slav's poetic nature expanded. Oh ! to live there together, quite by themselves, in a small keeper's lodge, with moss and thatch outside, and inside a luxurious nest ! He wanted to know since when she had loved him, what impression he had made the first time. He translated to her poetry of his country, rhythmized with light kisses on her neck, on her eyes ; and she listened, pretended to understand, to respond, her eyelids closing, sleepy from her broken night.

Eternal discord of love duets ! Christian wanted to bury himself in solitary, unexplored parts ; Sephora sought out the famous spots, the labelled curiosities of the forest ; she hoped thus to escape the boring and monotonous love song.

Now they followed a dark alley, with impenetrable shade, with deep, wet ruts, on either side rows of trees, like the pillars of a cathedral, forming silent naves, where was heard the step of a deer, the fall of a golden leaf. An immense sadness fell from those heights, those branches without birds, sonorous and empty as deserted houses. Christian, always ~~amorous~~, as the day grew on, coloured his passion with a note of melancholy and of mourning. He related how before setting off he had made his will, and what emotion he had felt at those words, written in the fulness of life, which belonged to the yonder dew of the grave.

"Yes, it's very tedious," said Sephora, like somebody thinking of something else.

But he thought himself so beloved, he was so used to being loved, that he paid no attention to her abstraction. He even comforted her beforehand, in case of an accident, mapped out for her a scheme of life ; she would have to sell the *hotel*, retire to the country, where she could live with her memories of him—all delightfully fatuous, and *naïf*, and sincere, for he felt in his heart a farewell sadness which he took for presentiments of death. And in a low voice, their hands twined together, he spoke to her of a future life. He wore round his neck a small medal of the Virgin, which never left him ; he unloosed it for her. You may fancy how happy Sephora was !

Presently appeared an artillery camp. They saw, through the trees, rows of grey tents, light smoke, horses unbridled, hobbled for the night, giving the King's ideas another direction. The coming and going of uniforms, the fatigue parties, all that activity in the open air, with a setting sun, that consoling aspect of soldiers in the field, reawoke the instincts of his nomadic and warrior race. The carriage, rolling over the moss

of the vast avenue, drew the attention of the soldiers, busied with pitching the tents or making soup; they laughingly stared at the swell and his pretty girl as they passed, and Christian would have liked to speak to them, harangue them. A bugle sounded, others responded. Before an officer's tent, a little apart from the others, a beautiful Arab horse, with dilated nostrils, flowing mane, pranced, neighing at the warlike sounds. The Slav's eyes glittered. Ah! what a fine life in a few days, the stout blows he was going to bestow! But what a pity Lebeau, going on to Marseilles, had taken the luggage; he would so much have liked her to see him in his lieutenant-general's costume! And working himself into excitement, he imagined the gates of the town forced, the Republicans routed, his triumphal entry into Leybach through the beflagged streets. She should be there, by the living God! He would send for her, install her in a splendid palace at the gates of the town. They would go on seeing each other as freely as in Paris. Sephora did not make much answer to those fine plans. No doubt she would have preferred to keep him to herself, all to herself; and Christian admired her for that silent self-sacrifice, which well suited her rank as the King's mistress.

Ah! how he loved her, and how quickly that evening passed at the Hotel du Faisan, in their red room; the large light curtains fallen upon a summer evening, such as there is in a small town, sparsely lit, buzzing with conversations before the doors, amid the noise of passers-by soon dispersed at the sound of the drums and the bugles! What kisses, what mad-nesses, passionate vows that went to rejoin the kisses and vows of the previous night! Deliciously exhausted, pressing close against each other, they listened to the strong beating of their hearts, while the warm wind shook the curtains after murmuring in the trees, and a fountain played, as in an Arabian *patio*, in the centre of the little garden of the hotel, where the red and flickering office lamp was the only thing awake.

One o'clock. He must be off. Christian dreaded it, that wrench of the last minute, believing that he would have to contend against the entreaties and caresses, that he would have to summon up all his courage. Sephora, however, was ready before him, wanted to accompany him to the station, less careful of her love than of her loyal lover's honour. If he could have heard the "out" she uttered, the cruel girl, when, alone on the platform, she saw the two green eyes of the train winding away afar off; if he could have known how glad seh

was to go and end the night at the hotel alone, whilst, as the empty omnibus rattled her over the old pavement of Fontainebleau, she said to herself coolly, pure of any love emotion: "Provided Tom has done the needful!"

Most certainly the needful was done; because, on the arrival of the train at Marseilles, Christian II, on alighting from the carriage, his little valise in his hand, was very surprised to see a flat, silver-braided cap approach him, and beg him most politely to step into his office a moment.

"What for? Who are you?" asked the King very loudly.

The flat cap informed him:

"Government commissary!"

In the officer Christian discovered the prefect of Marseilles, a former journalist, with a red beard, a lively and clever face.

"I am sorry to inform your Majesty that your voyage stops here," observed the latter in a tone of exquisite politeness. "My government could not permit a prince on whom France bestows her hospitality, to profit by it in order to conspire and arm against a friendly country."

The King wanted to protest. But the smallest details of the expedition were known to the prefect.

"You were to embark at Marseilles; your companions at Cette on a Jersey steamer. The place of disembarkation was the shore of Gravosa; the signal two rockets, one from the ship, the other on land. You see we are well informed. They are also at Ragusa; and I am saving you from a regular ambuscade."

Christian II., dumfounded, asked himself who could have betrayed secrets known only to himself, the Queen, Hezeta, and one other, whom he was certainly very far from suspecting. The prefect smiled in his fair beard.

"Well, monseigneur, you have to do the best for yourself. It is a misfire. You will be luckier another time, and more cautious too. Now I beg your Majesty to accept the shelter I offer you at the prefecture. Anywhere else you would be the butt of annoying curiosity. The affair is known in the town."

Christian did not at once reply. He looked round this small room, filled by a green armchair, green portfolios, an earthenware stove, and large railway maps, this miserably *bourgeois* corner, in which his heroic dream and the last echoes of the Rodoitza March had just been destroyed. It was like a balloonist, departing for levels higher than mountain tops, and descending almost at once on a peasant's hut, the

poor balloon deflated, like a bundle of gummed canvas, under a stable roof.

At last, however, he accepted the invitation ; found at the prefect's a genuinely Parisian home, a charming wife, an excellent musician, who, dinner ended, after a chat in which they discussed all the topics of the day, sat down to the piano, and ran through some new songs. She had a nice voice, sang very pleasantly, and gradually Christian drew near, talked music and opera. The "Echoes of Illyria" was lying on the musicstand between the "Reine de Saba" and the "Julie Parfumeuse." She asked him to show her the movement, the colour of the songs of his country. Christian II. hummed some popular airs.

And while, leaning against the piano, pale, fascinating, he affected the sad tones and poses of an exile, away yonder on the Illyrian sea, about whose billows tipped with snow, and banks indented with cactus the "Echoes" sang, a fine and enthusiastic body of young men, whom Lebeau had neglected to warn, rushed joyously towards death to the cry of : "Long live Christian II. !"

Chapter Eleven

CONDEMNED TO DEATH

"MY DEAR WIFE,—We have just been taken back to the citadel of Ragusa, Monsieur de Hezeta and I, after a sitting of ten hours in the theatre of the Corso, where sat the council of war appointed to try us. We have been unanimously condemned to death.

"I may tel you I prefer it so At least now we know where we are, and we are no longer in strict confinement. I read your letters, I can write to you. That silence was stifling me. To know nothing of you, of my father, of the King, whom I thought killed, the victim of some ambuscade ! Happily his Majesty has escaped at the price of a melancholy failure and the loss of some loyal servants. Things might be worse for us.

"The papers—is it not so ?—must have told you how things turned out. The King's counter-order not having reached us, by some incredible fatality, at seven P.M. we found ourselves to leeward of the islands at the rendezvous—Hezeta and I on deck, the others in the cabin, all armed, equipped, your pretty little cockade in our hats. We cruise about two hours—three

hours. Nothing to be seen but the fishing boats or those big feluccas of the coasting trade. Night comes, and at the same time a sea-fog very incommoding for our meeting with Christian II. After a long wait, we come to the conclusion that his Majesty's steamer has perhaps passed near without seeing us, and has anchored inshore. Just then, behold ! ; from the bank where they were to expect our signal, a rocket goes up into the sky. That meant : 'Land !' No more doubts, the King is there. Let us go and join him.

"Owing to my knowledge of the country—I have so often shot wild duck in those parts—I commanded the first sloop, Hezeta the second. Monsieur de Miremont had the third with the Parisians. We were all Illyrians in my boat, so our hearts beat quickly. It was our country we had before us, that black coast climbing in the fog, ending in a small red light, the revolving light of Gravosa. All the same the silence on shore surprised me; nothing but the waves breaking—a long, rippling noise, without that mysterious sound of a crowd, in which is always heard a clattering of arms, a panting of held breaths.

" 'I see our men !' said Sangiorgio in a whisper, near me.

"We observed on landing that what we took for the King's volunteers were clumps of cactus, of Barbary fig-trees planted in rows on the bank. I go forward. Nobody. But signs of trampling, furrows in the sand. I said to the Marquis : 'There's something wrong. Let's re-embark.' Unfortunately the Parisians arrived. And to keep them back ! There they were, scattering about the shore, rummaging in the bushes, the thickets. All at once, a line of fire, a crackling of musketry. They shout : 'Treason ! treason ! to the sea !' They rush to the boats—a regular panic of animals, packed together, maddened, jostling. There was a moment of wretched panic, lit up by the moon, which rose and showed us our English sailors rowing off as hard as possible to the steamer. But that did not last long. Hezeta was the first to dash forward, revolver in hand : 'Avanti ! Avanti !' What a voice ! The whole shore echoed with it. We follow him. Fifty against an army ! There was nothing but to die. All our men did so with great courage. Pozzo, de Melida, the little de Soris, who was in love with you last year, Henri de Trebique, who shouted to me in the scuffle : 'I say, Herbert, we want the guzlas !' and Jean de Veliko, who, whilst thrusting with his sword, sang the 'Rodoitza' with all his lungs—all have fallen ; I saw them on the beach, lying on the sand and gazing at the sky. Then the

rising tide probably came and swallowed them up, those fine dancers in our ball ! Less luckily than our comrades, the marquis and I, the only survivors of that hail of bullets, were taken, bound, carried to Ragusa on mulesback, your Herbert howling with powerless rage, while Hezeta said, very calmly : 'It was fatal. I knew it !' Curious man ! How could he know we should be betrayed, delivered up, received on landing with grapeshot ; and if he knew, why did he lead us into it ? Anyhow, the stroke has failed, it is a job to be done over again with more precaution.

"I understand now, through your dear letters, which I cannot weary of reading and rereading, the reason for the delay of our trial, of those promenades of lawyers in the citadel, that haggling about our two lives, those ups and downs, those waitings. The wretches were treating us as hostages, hoping that the King, who refused to abdicate the throne for millions, would yield when the lives of two royal servants were in question. And you are exasperated, my darling, you are amazed, being blinded by your tenderness, that my father did not say a word in favour of his son. But could a Rosen commit such a cowardice ? He does not love me the less, poor old man, and my death will be a fearful blow to him. As for our sovereigns, whom you accuse of cruelty, we cannot judge them, as we have not that high standpoint which serves them to govern men. They have duties, rights, apart from the common rule. Ah ! what beautiful things Meraut told you about it ! Myself, I can feel, but not express them. My jawbone is too heavy. How often that has bothered me in regard to you, whom I love so well, to whom I have never been able to say it properly ! Even here, separated by so many leagues and so many big iron bars, the thought of your pretty, grey, Parisian eyes, your naughty mouth beneath your little nose, which frowns to rally me, intimidates me, paralyses me.

"And still, before leaving you for ever, I must try and make you understand that I have never loved anyone but you in the world, that life began for me that day I first knew you. You remember, Colette ? It was in the shops of the Rue Royale, at Tom Levis's. We were supposed to be there by chance. You tried a piano ; you played. You sang something very lively which, I know not why, made me want to cry on the spot. I was in love. Eh ? Who would have thought it ? A marriage *a la Parisienne*, a marriage through an agency, become a love marriage ! And since then, in the world, in no

world, have I found a woman so seductive as my Colette. So you may be easy, you have always been in my heart, even when absent ; the thought of your pretty face kept me in good humour. I would laugh when thinking of it, quite by myself. It's true that you have always inspired me with that feeling, a desire to laugh affectionately. Well, at this moment, our position is terrible, especially in the way in which we are made to release it. Hezeta and I are *en chapelle* ; that is to say, in the little cell, with white-washed walls, an altar has been raised for our last Mass, a coffin has been put before each bed, and on the walls are hung cards on which is written : 'Dead—Dead.' Nevertheless, my room appears cheerful to me. I escape those funereal threats by thinking of my Colette, and when I raise myself up to our grated window, this wonderful country, the road descending from Ragusa to Gravosa, the aloes, the cactus against the blue sky and sea, all remind me of our wedding trip : the Corniche road between Monaco and Monte Carlo, and the tinkle of the mule bells, bearing along our happiness, tinkling and joyous as itself. Oh ! my little wife ! how pretty you were, dear traveller, with whom I should have liked to journey a longer time.

"You see that your image remains and triumphs over all, on the threshold of death, in death itself ; for I intend to keep it on my breast as a scapulary, down there, at the harbour, where we are to be led in a few hours ; and it will enable me to fall smiling. So, my beloved, don't grieve too much. Think of the little one ; think of the child who is about to be born. Keep yourself for him, and when he can understand, tell him I died like a soldier, erect, with two names on my lips—the name of my wife and that of my King.

"I should have liked to leave you a souvenir of the last moment, but I have been robbed of every jewel, watch, wedding ring, and pin. I have nothing but a pair of white gloves I intended for the entry into Ragusa. I shall presently put them on to honour my execution ; and the chaplain of the prison has promised me to send you them afterwards.

"Well, adieu, my darling Colette. Don't cry. I tell you that, and for myself the tears are blinding me. Comfort my father. Poor man ! he who always scolded me for coming late for the orders. I shall come no more now ! Good-bye. Good-bye. Still, I had so many things to tell you. But no, I must die. What a fate ! Good-bye, Colette."

"HERBERT DE ROSEN."

Chapter Twelve

A DENOUEMENT

"YOU have still one course left, sire !"

"Speak, my dear Meraut. I am ready for anything."

Meraut hesitated to reply. What he was going to say seemed to him too serious, truly out of place, in that billiard-room, where the King had brought him to play a game after lunch. However, the singular irony that presides over the destiny of dethroned sovereigns had decreed that the fate of the royal race of Illyria should be decided there, before the green cloth on which the balls rolled, with an ominous and hollow rumble in the silence and mourning of the house at Saint-Mande.

"Well ?" asked Christian II, stretching out to reach the ball.

"Well ! Monseigneur——"

He waited till the King had finished his cannons, till Councillor Boscovich had piously marked them up, to go on, with a shade of embarrassment :

"The people of Illyria are like all peoples, sire. They love success, strength, and I'm afraid the disastrous result of our last enterprise——"

The King turned, his cheeks red :

"I asked you for the truth, my dear fellow ; no good trying to fob me off with that sort of stuff."

"Sire, you must abdicate," said the Gascon brutally.

Christian gazed at him in stupor.

"Abdicate what ? I've got nothing. A nice present to make to my son. I believe he'd prefer a new velocipede to the vague promise of a crown at his majority"

Meraut quoted the example of the Queen of Galicia. She too had abdicated in favour of her son during their exile ; and if Don Leonce was on the throne to-day, he owed it to that abdication.

"Eighteen to twelve !" cried Christian sharply. "Councillor, you're not marking."

Boscovich leapt like a frightened hare and dashed to the board, while the King, his whole body, his whole mind tense, was absorbed in a marvellous break. Elysee looked at him, and his Royalist faith was put to a rough test in the presence of that type of backboneless dandy, vanquished ingloriously,

his thin neck showing in his low-cut flannel jacket, his eyes mouth, nostrils still coloured with the jaundice from which he had scarcely recovered, and which had kept him in bed nearly a month. The disaster at Gravosa, the sinister end of all those young men, the dreadful scenes which the trial of Herbert and Hezeta had caused at Saint Mande, Colette dragging herself on her knees before her former lover to win mercy for her husband, those days of anguish, of waiting, his ear bent towards the horrible platoon-fire which he seemed to be ordering himself, and, in addition, money worries, Pichery's first bills coming due, that piling-up of evil fortune, without getting the better of the Slav's indifference, had yet hit him physically.

He stopped after his break, and, chalking his cue most carefully, inquired of Merant, without looking at him :

"What says the Queen about this notion of abdicating? Have you spoken to her?"

"The Queen thinks like myself, sire."

"Ah!" he rejoined drily, with a slight start.

Eccentricity of the human being! That woman, whom he did not love, whose distrustful coldness and clear glance he feared, that woman whom he reproached with treating him too much like a king, overwhelmed by her perpetual reminders of his duties and his prerogatives, he was now angry with her for no longer believing in him, for abandoning him for the benefit of the child. He felt, not a hurt to his love, but one of those stabs that make one cry out, the chill from a friend's betrayal, a confidence lost.

"And you, Boscovich, what do you think of it?" he said suddenly, turning to his councillor, whose smooth, anxious countenance imitated his master's convulsively.

The botanist made a slight Italian pantomime gesture, his arms open, his head buried in his shoulders, a dumb "*Chi lo sa?*" so timid, so little compromising, that the King could not help laughing.

"On the advice of our council," he bantered, in nasal tones, "we shall abdicate when we are wanted to."

Thereupon, his Majesty went on again striking the balls enthusiastically, to the great despair of Elysee, who burned to go and announce to the Queen the success of a negotiation she had not wished to carry on herself; for this phantom king still imposed on her, and it was only in trembling that she raised her hand to that crown he no longer wanted.

The abdication took place some time later. The head of

of the civil and military establishment stoically suggested the splendid galleries of the Hotel Rosen for the ceremony, to which it is customary to give the greatest solemnity, authenticity, possible. But the disaster of Gravosa was still too fresh for those reception-rooms, filled with echoes of the last festivity; it would have truly been too melancholy and of ill augury for the coming reign. So it was agreed to gather at Saint-Mande some noble Illyrian and French families, whose signatures were necessary at the foot of a deed of such importance.

At two the carriages began to arrive, the rings at the bell followed each other, while, on the large carpets rolled down from the door to the bottom of the perron, the guests ascended slowly, received at the entrance of the drawing-room by the Duke de Rosen, buttoned up in his general's uniform, wearing round his neck, over his crosses, the broad cordon of Illyria, which he had laid aside without a word when he learnt the scandal about the wig-maker, Biscarat, wearing the very same insignia over his Figaro's vest. Round his arm, on his sword-hilt, he wore a long new crape band, and, more significant still than the crape, a senile shaking of the head, an unconscious way of continually saying, "No, no," which he had kept since the terrible debate in his presence on the subject of saving Herbert, a debate in which he had vigorously refused to take part, in spite of Colette's entreaties and the revolts of his paternal affection. It seemed as if his little, shaking, hawk-like skull was bearing the punishment of his inhuman refusal, and that he was condemned henceforth to say "no" to every impression, every feeling—life itself—since nothing existed for him now, nothing could interest him after his son's tragic end.

Princess Colette was there also, wearing with much grace the mourning suited to her fair hair, a widowhood which was diverted into a hope already visible in her heavier figure, her slower walk. Even amid her sincere grief, her little dress-maker's soul, encumbered with futilities, uncorrected by the severity of fate, found, thanks to the child, a crowd of coquettish, frivolous vanities to gratify. The ribbons, the laces, the superb trousseau, which she was having embroidered with an original monogram under her princely crown, served as a diversion from her grief. The baby should be called Wanceslas or Witold, Wilhemine if it was a girl, but very certainly its

name would begin with a "W," because it is an aristocratic letter, pretty to work on linen.

She was explaining her plans to Madam de Silvis, when the door opened to its fullest extent for the announcement, preceded by a blow from a halberd, of the Princes and Princesses de Trebique, de Soris, the Duke de Sangiorgio, the Duchess de Melida, Counts Pozzo, de Miremont, de Veliko. It was like a death roll, proclaimed in a loud voice, returned by a resonant echo from the bloody beach, of all the young victims fallen at Gravosa. And the most terrible thing of all, what would give the ceremony a disastrous and funereal aspect, despite the precautions taken, the sumptuous livery, the elaborate hangings, was that all the new-comers were in deep mourning, with black dresses and gloves, smothered in those woolen stuffs, so dreary to look at, which have an imprisoning effect on women's walk and gestures; the mourning of old people, fathers and mothers, gloomier, more heartrending, more unjust in its burden than any other. Many of them had come out for the first time since the catastrophe, drawn from their solitudes, their seclusion, by devotion to the dynasty. They straightened themselves up to enter, summoned up all their courage; but as they looked at each other, sinister mirrors of the same sorrow, with bent heads, quivering, contracted shoulders, they felt rising to their eyes the tears they saw, to their lips the sigh so hardly restrained at their side; and soon a nervous contagion spread, filled the reception-room with a long sigh broken by stifled cries, groans. Old Rosen alone did not weep, and raising his tall, inflexible figure, continued to nod implacably: "No, no; he must die!"

That evening, at the Cafe de Londres, his Royal Highness the Prince d'Axel, who was invited to sign the abdication, related he fancied he was assisting at a first-class burial, all the family assembled, waiting for the corpse to be removed.

"The King, gentlemen!"

Christian II., very pale, with a visibly careworn air, came in first, holding his son by the hand.

The little prince showed a gravity which fitted him well, enhanced by the black jacket and the trousers which he wore for the first time with a certain pride, the serious gracefulness of a youth.

The Queen came next, very beautiful in a sumptuous mauve dress covered with lace, too sincere, likewise, to hide

her joy, which burst forth in the surrounding gloom like the brightness of her dress beside the mourning garments. She was so happy, so selfishly happy, that she did not bend for a moment towards the sublime distresses that environed her, any more than she noticed in the quivering garden that fog on the panes, and the black of a November week, wandering in a low, moist sky, full of fog and torpor. That day remained in her memory, luminous and warming. So true is it that everything is in us, and that the outward world is changed, is coloured by the thousand shades of our passions. Christian II. placed himself in front of the chimney-piece in the middle of the *salon*, with the Count de Zara on his right, the Queen on his left; a little farther Boscovich, in his ermine, as aulic councillor, sitting at a small writing-table. Everyone in his place, the King began in a very low voice to say he was ready to sign his abdication, and to let his subjects know why. Next rose Boscovich, and, in his little shrill voice, read Christian's manifesto to the nation, the brief history in broad outlines of the early hopes of the reign, the disillusion, the misunderstandings that had followed, and finally the King's resolution to retire from public affairs, and entrust his son to the generosity of the Illyrian people.

This short letter, in which the first of Elysee Merlaut had left its mark in every word, was so badly read, like a tedious mechanical catalogue, that it allowed full time for reflecting what absurdity there was in that abdication of an exiled prince, that handing over of powers which did not exist, of rights denied and misunderstood. The deed itself, then read by the King, was thus formulated:

"I Christian II., King of Illyria, Dalmatia, Grand Duke of Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., etc., declare that of my own will and without yielding to any foreign pressure, I leave and transfer to my son, Charles Alexis Leopold, Count de Goetz and de Zara, all my political rights, reserving only over him my civil rights as father and guardian."

At a sign from the Duke de Rosen, all those present approached the table to sign. For a few moments, only a sound of shuffling feet, a rustling of stuffs, with waitings, pauses, produced by the ceremony, a scratching of heavy and trembling pens. Then the kissing hands began.

Christian II. began the ball and acquitted himself of that difficult task—the homage of a father to his son—kissed his fragile fingers with more intellectual graciousness than respect.

The Queen, on the other hand, had a passionate feeling almost religious; the protectress, the egg-hatcher, became the humble subject. Then came Prince d'Axel's turn, then of all the grand seigneurs, defiling in hieratical order, which the little King began to find very long, despite the charming dignity of his candid eyes, and his extended hand, a small veined hand, with the square nails of a child who is still playing, with rather large wrists, disproportioned during growing. Elysee, a respecter of traditions, came up last to kiss hands. As he was retiring, Frederique, standing near her son, like the mother of young brides in vestries, to receive the last homages and smiles, said to him in an exultant, nervous, very low voice, as he passed :

"It's done !"

There was in her intonation an almost ferocious fulness of joy and unspeakable relief.

"It's done !"—that is to say, the diadem safe from trafficks and soilings. She could now sleep, breathe, live, free from the continual apprehensions which announced to her catastrophes in advance, would have enabled her to say, at each fatal denouement, "I knew it." Her son would not be dispossessed, her son would be king.

As soon as the ceremony was over, the child's nature took the upper hand, and Leopold V. darted joyfully to old Jean de Velico, to announce his great news :

"You know, godfather, I've got a pony—a pretty little pony, all to myself. The general will teach me to ride and also."

Whilst they bent towards him with looks of adoration, Christian, rather solitary, deserted, felt a strange, indefinable feeling, as of a lightening around his skull, the chill of his removed crown, his head felt positively light. Yet he had much desired that hour, craved, more than anything else, the responsibilities of his position. Then why this uneasiness, this depression, now that he saw the shore flee before him ?

"Well, my poor Christian, I believe you've got your marmoset."

It was the Prince d'Axel who consoled him, in his way, in a very low voice.

"You're lucky, you are. I should be happy if the same thing happened to me, if I were freed from leaving this beautiful Paris, in order to go and reign over my people of white-stomached seals !"

He continued for a short time in the same tone, then they

A DENOUEMENT

both disappeared, profiting by the tumult, the inattention of the others. The Queen saw them go out, heard the phaeton rolling in the court, whose light wheels did not depart once without passing over her heart. But what did it matter to her now? It was no longer the King of Illyria those women of Paris were taking from her. After Gravosa, in the first minute of his shame, Christian had sworn not to see Sephora again. As long as he was in bed, fearing illness, like any Southerner, he only thought of his mistress, to curse her, to charge her morally with all his faults, but convalescence, the more active blood, the complete idleness in which memories, mingled with dreams, have so much force, were bound to change his feeling. He excused the woman, timidly at first, and only saw in what had happened a fatality—on of the thousand designs of Providence, on whom Catholics discharge all fatiguing responsibility.

One day, at last, he dared to ask Lebeau if there was any news of the countess. For all answer, the valet brought him a quantity of little letters which had arrived during his illness—tender, inflamed, timid notes, a shower, a cloud of white turtle doves cooing love.

Christian's senses were heated by them. He replied from his bed on the spot, impatient to resume, as soon as he was well, the interrupted romance of Fontainebleau.

Meanwhile J. Tom Levis and his wife were spending a pleasant holiday in their *hotel* in the Avenue de Messine. The foreign agent had not been able to endure any longer the boredom of his seclusion at Courbevoie. He wanted the life of business, trafficking—above all, Sephora's admiration. In fact, he was jealous, with a stupid, obstinate, throbbing jealousy, like a fishbone in the throat which you think has gone, and whose prick you suddenly feel; and no way to complain to anybody, to say: "Just look what I've got there at the bottom of my throat." Unhappy Tom Levis, hoisted by his own petard, inventor and victim of the grand stroke! Sephora's voyage to Fontainebleau particularly disquieted him. Several times he tried to return to the subject, but she always stopped him with a burst of such natural laughter: "What's the matter with you, my poor Tom? What rot!" that he was obliged to laugh also, understanding that there was nothing between them but clownery, but bluffing, and that Sephora's fancy, the fancy of a young girl for a clown,

would quickly cease if she believed him jealous, sentimental, a verdant green like the rest of them.

Verily he was in pain, was bored at living far from her—even wrote verses. Yes, the man of the hansom, the imaginative Narcisse, had discovered this consolation for his disquiets, a poem to Sephora, one of those queer lucubrations, scanned with pretentious ignorance, such as are confiscated at Mazas on the prisoner's table. Truly, if Christian II. had not fallen ill, Tom J. Levis would have.

I leave you to imagine the joy which the clown and his fair wife felt at being together again, at living together for some weeks.

One afternoon the countess was getting ready to go to the Bois. Madame is ready, she and Tom are about to start. A last look in the mirror. "Come along." Suddenly the hall door opens, the bell rings hurriedly. "The King!" And while the husband rushes into the dressing-room, with a terrible rolling of the eyes, Sephora runs to the window just in time to see Christian II. coming up the perron with a languishing air. He soars, he has wings. "How happy she will be!" he says to himself as he comes up.

The fair one guesses there is something new; prepares herself. As a beginning, she utters, as she sees him, a cry of surprise, of joyous emotion, falls into his arms, gets herself carried to a chair, before which he kneels.

"Yes, I—it's me—and for ever."

She looks at him with wide-open eyes, maddened with love and hope. And he, plunged, drowned in her gaze, exclaims:

"It's done; there is no longer a King of Illyria. Nothing but a man who wants to spend his life in loving you."

"It is too beautiful. I don't dare to believe it."

"Well, read."

She took the parchment, unfolded it slowly.

"So it's true, my Christian, you have renounced?"

"Better than that."

And whilst she ran through the text of the deed, he, standing up, twisted his moustache, regarded Sephora with a triumphant air; then, finding that she did not understand quite, not quickly enough, he explained to her the difference between renunciation and abdication, and that he would be quite as free, disengaged of duties and responsibilities, without involving in any way his son's future. But the money—but, they did not need so many millions in order to be happy.

She read no longer, listened to him, her mouth half open, her pretty teeth showing in a keen smile, as if she wished the better to seize what he was saying. She had nevertheless understood well; oh yes! saw very clearly the crumbling of all their ambitions and of the piles of louis already involved in the business the wrath of Leemans, of Pichery, of the whole band despoiled by that idiot's false manœuvre. She reflected about so many useless sacrifices, about her last six months of killing life, dishortened by dissimulations and mawkishness, about her poor Tom, holding his breath even then in the dressing-room, whilst the fool in front of her expected an explosion of tenderness, assured of being loved, vanquishing, irresistible, pulverising. It was so funny, with such complete, such ferocious irony! She got up, seized with a mad laughter, an insulting and contemptuous laughter, which brought a quick red to her face, the stirred dregs of her coarse nature; and, passing in front of Christian, who was dumfounded: "You—get out!" she yelled at him, before she shut herself in her room with triple bolts.

Without a halfpenny, without a crown, without a wife, without a mistress, he made a singular figure as he again went down the stairs.

Chapter Thirteen

THE LITTLE KING

OH! magic of words! as if there had been in those four letters of the word "King" a cabalistic force, as soon as he was called no longer the Count de Zara, but King Leopold I., Meraut's pupil was transformed. The painstaking child, mouldable as a small piece of soft wax, but without any superiority of understanding, awoke, by a singular excess of excitement, and his body was strengthened at his inward flame. His laziness of nature, his desire of stretching himself, of lying in an arm chair whilst he was being read to, that need of hearing, of living on the thoughts of others, changed into an activity which was no longer satisfied by the games of his age. Old General de Rosen, bent with age, had to find the strength to give him his first lessons in fencing, shooting, riding; and nothing could be more touching than to see, every morning at nine, the ex-Pandour, in a blue coat, whip in hand, standing in a clearing of the park, widened into an arena, to go through his duties of a riding master, with the air of an old Franconi, always respectful to the King whilst

correcting his pupil's mistakes. The little Leopold trotted galloped, serious and proud, attentive to the least words, while the Queen looked on from the top of the stone steps, throwing in a remark, a piece of advice : "Hold yourself straight, sir, give it its head." And some times, in order to make her better understood, she would run down, would add gesture to words. How happy she was on the day when, her horse relating its step to that of the prince's pony, they ventured into the neighbouring wood, the child's silhouette overshadowed by his mother's, who, far from feeling a mother's fears, vigorously urged on the animals, led the way for her son, took him as far as Joinville in a gallop. She too was changed since the abdication. In the eyes of this superstitious believer in Divine right thenceforth the title of protected the child. Her tenderness, as strong and deep as before, no longer showed itself in outbursts of caresses ; and though at night she always came into his room, it was no longer to see Zara "put to bed" to tuck him up in his bed. A *valet de chambre* had now in charge of all that, as if Frederique feared to make her effeminate, to retard his character as a man by keeping him with too gentle hands. She only came to him to say a beautiful prayer, taken from the "Book of Kings," which Father Alphee had taught him :

"Oh Lord, my God, Thou hast placed Thy servant on the throne ; but I am only a child, knowing not how to guide myself, and charged with the guidance of the people Thou hast given unto me. Vouchsafe to me, O Lord, the necessary wisdom and intelligence"

The prince's little voice would rise, firm and clear, tinged with authority, with a conviction which was touching if the thought of his exile in the corner of a poor suburb far away from that hypothetical throne beyond the seas. But in the eyes of Frederique her Leopold reigned already, and she would give him into her nightly kiss a humble pride, an indefinable adoration, respect, which reminded Elysee, when he noticed this mixture of maternal dealings, of the old carols of his country, in which the Virgin sings, whilst rocking Jesus in the stable : "I Thy servant, and Thou art my God."

Some months passed like this, a whole winter season during which the Queen felt only one shadow over her son, which had at last become clear, and it was Meraut who perceived quite unconsciously the cause. By dreaming both the same dream, by mingling their glances and their souls, by going

together to the same goal in close union, they had established between them a familiarity, a community of thought and of life, which suddenly disquieted Frederique, without her knowing exactly why. When alone with him she no longer let herself go, as formerly ; she was frightened at the place this stranger held in her most intimate decisions. Did she guess the feelings that agitated him, that ardour, burning so close to her, more absorbing and dangerous every day ? A woman does not make mistakes in that. She would have wished to shelter herself, to recover herself again, but how ? In her trouble she had recourse to the guide, the adviser of the Catholic wife—to her confessor.

When he was not wandering about the country for the purpose of his Royalist propaganda, it was Father Alphee who directed the Queen. To see the man was to recognise the type. There was in that Illyrian priest, with his pirate face, the blood, the appearance, the features of one of the old Uscoques, birds of prey and storm, who swept the Latin seas. The son of a fisherman of the port of Zara, brought up among tar brushes and fishing nets, he was chosen one day by the Franciscans for his pretty voice ; from cabin boy became a chorister, grew up at the convent, and was one of the heads of the Brotherhood ; but there remained in him a sailor's impetuosity, and the tan of the sea on his skin which the chill of the cloister stones had never been able to whiten. Moreover, neither bigoted nor over-particular, ready to draw his knife in case of need for the good cause, the monk when politics pressed, would despatch in a block in the morning all the orisons of the day, even those of the morrow, "in order to get on," he would say seriously. Devoted in his loves as in his hates, he had vowed limitless admiration for the tutor he had introduced himself into the household. So, at the Queen's first avowal of her troubles, her scruples, he pretended not to understand ; then, when she insisted, he flew in to a temper, spoke roughly to her as to an ordinary penitent, to some rich shopkeeper's wife of Ragusa.

Was she not ashamed to mix up such childishness in so noble a cause ? What did she complain of ? Had they been wanting in respect to her ? What a wickedness to deprive oneself of this man whom God had certainly set in their way for the triumph of Royalty, because of excessive religious scruples, or of some feminine coquetry ! and in his sailor language, his Italian emphasis, toned down by an artful priestly

smile, he added that one should not quarrel with the good mind which Heaven sends us. "We set the sail and forge ahead." The most upright woman will always be weak in the presence of plausible arguments. Overcome by the monk's casuistry, Frederique told herself she really could not deprive her son's cause of such an auxiliary. It was for her to be on guard, to be strong. What did she risk? She even managed to persuade herself she was mistaken about Elysee's devotion, about his enthusiastic friendship. The truth was—he loved her passionately. A strange, deep love, which he had thrust aside many times, but which had slowly returned by a roundabout way, to be finally established with the invading despotism of a conquest. Up till then, Elysee Meraut had believed himself incapable of a tender sentiment. Sometimes, in the course of his royalist speeches in the Quartier Latin, some girl of Bohemia, without understanding a word of what he was talking, had fallen madly in love with him, for the music of his voice, the fire of his eyes, his idealistic forehead—the magnetic fascination of Magdalens for Apostles. He would smilingly bend down to her, pluck what was offered, enveloping in kindness and light-hearted affability the incorrigible contempt for women which is at the bottom of every southerner. For love to enter into his heart, it had to pass through his strong head; and it was thus that his admiration for Frederique's haughty type, for her proud enduring of adversity, had in the long run become a veritable passion, a humble, discreet, hopeless passion, which was contented to burn at a distance, like a poor man's taper on the lowest step of the altar.

Life, however, went on, apparently the same, indifferent to such dumb dramas, and so came the first days of September. The Queen, enveloped in fine sunshine, harmonising well with her cheerful mood, was taking a stroll after lunch, followed by the Duke, Elysee and Madame de Silvis who was the dame of honour in the place of the little princess. They followed her through the shady, ivy-bordered alleys, and the little English park, and she would turn round as she walked to utter a word, a phrase, with the decided grace which did not diminish her feminine charm. She was particularly lively and gay that day. They had received that morning news from Illyria, relating to the excellent effect produced by the abdication, the popularity of the name of Leopold V. among the country people. Elysee Meraut was triumphant.

"Didn't I tell you, Monsieur le Duc, that they would go

wild about their little King ? Childhood, you see, reawakens all their affections ; it is like a new religion which we have infused into them, with its simplicities, its fervours ”

Pushing back his hair with his long hands, with a violent gesture peculiar to him, he dashed into one of his elegant improvisations which transfigured him, even as the weary Arab covering in rags on the ground would not be recognised on horseback.

“We’re in for a dose,” whispered the Marquise, with an air of boredom, whilst the Queen, in order to hear better, sat down on the edge of a path, in the shade of a weeping ash. The others stood respectfully round her ; but little by little the audience thinned. Madame de Silvis was the first to retire, ostensibly to protest, as she never missed doing ; the duke was wanted for some business connected with his office.

They were alone. Elysee did not perceive it, and continued his discourse, standing in the sun which lighted up his noble, excited face, like the regularities of a hard stone. He was handsome then, with a fascinating, irresistible beauty of understanding, which struck Frederique too suddenly for her to conceal her admiration. Did he see it in her green eyes ? Did he receive in return the shock which an extremely keen feeling experienced close at hand communicates to us ? At first he stammered, stopped short, all trembling ; cast on the bent head of the Queen, on her golden hair, a long look, burning like an avowal. Frederique felt this flame running over her like a sun, more blinding, more disquieting than the other sun, but she had not the strength to turn away. And when, frightened at the words that were coming to his lips, Elysee quickly tore himself away from her, it seemed to her, all penetrated as she was by the man, by his magnetic power, that life was suddenly leaving her ; she felt a sort of moral swooning and remained there on that bench, fainting, crushed. Lilac shadows were hovering over the gravel of the winding alleys. The water trickled over the edges of the fountain, as if refreshing the beautiful summer afternoon. Nothing was heard in the flowering garden but a far-spread murmur of wings and insects, above the perfumed flowers and the dry crackle of the little prince’s carabine, who was shooting at the end of the park, near the wood.

Amid this silence, the Queen recovered herself, first of all in a movement of anger, of revolt. She felt herself outraged by that look. Was it possible ? Was she not dreaming ?

She the proud Frederique, who, in the brilliancy of court *fetes* had once disdained so much homage, and from the noblest, the most illustrious of men ; she, who guarded so loftily the pride of her heart, yield it to a nobody, to this son of the people ! Tears of pride burnt her eyes ; and in the trouble of her thoughts, a prophetic phrase of old Rosen sounded in her ears :

"The Bohemia of exile." Yes exile alone, with its dishonouring promiscuities, had enabled this underling—but, even as she overwhelmed him with contempt, the memory of services rendered assailed her. What would have become of them without him ? She recalled the emotion of their first meeting, how she had felt herself live again as she listened to him. Since then, whilst the King went about his pleasure, who had taken the direction of their destinies, repaired the blunders and the crimes ? And the unwearied devotion of each day so much talent, energy, all the fine genius he had applied to task of self-sacrifice without profit, without glory ! The result was the little King, a real king, of whom she was so proud, the future master of Illyria. Then, overcome by an invincible impulse of affection, of gratitude, the Queen closed her eyes, abandoned herself deliciously in thought to that great devoted heart which she imagined she felt beating against hers.

Suddenly, after a shot which frightened the birds in the branches, a loud cry—one of those cries that mothers hear in their dreams during nights troubled with anxiety, a dreadful call of distress, darkened the whole sky, expanded, transformed the garden in the measure of an immense sorrow. Hasty steps were heard in the alleys ; the voice of the tutor, hoarse and altered, was calling yonder, near the shooting place. Frederique was there like a flash.

It was at the end of the park, hung with hops, vines, and the tall flora of rather rank land, the green shade of an arbour. The targets hung against the trelliswork, pierced with little, regular, cruel holes. She saw her son on the ground on his back, motionless ; his face white, reddened towards the right eye, which, closed, wounded, let fall some drops of blood, like tears. Elysee, on his knees beside him in the alley, was crying out, was wringing his hands.

"It's me. It's me."

He was passing, Monseigneur had wanted him to try his gun, and by a fearful accident, the ball rebounding on some

piece of iron in the trellis—but the Queen was not listening. Without a cry, without a complaint, entirely absorbed in her maternal instinct to save the boy, she took hold of him, carried him in her dress towards the fountain; then waving away the people of the house who hurried to her assistance, she leant her knee, on which lay the little King's inert body, against the edge of the stone, held under the overflowing basin the adored pale face, to which the fair hair clung ominously, and let the water flow on to the discoloured eyelid. She did not speak, she did not even think. In her rumpled soaking cambric dress, which clung to her beautiful body as to a naiad of marble, she bent over her little one and watched.

What a moment of dreadful waiting! Revived gradually by the immersion, the wounded child stirred, stretched his limbs as if to awake, and suddenly began to moan.

"He lives," she exclaimed, wild with joy.

Then, raising her head, she perceived Meraut opposite her, who seemed to be asking pardon with his paleness, his dejection. The memory of what had happened as she sat on the bench recurred to her, mingled with the awful shock of the accident, with her weakness so quickly punished in her child. A rage seized her against the man, against herself.

"Go away! Go away! Let me never see you again," she cried to him with a terrible look. It was her love that avowed before all, to punish herself for it, to cure herself; her love which she threw as an affront in his face in the insolence of her words.

Chapter Fifteen

THE DARK ROOM

"THERE was once upon a time in the country of Oldenburgh, a countness of Ponikau, to whom the dwarfs had given on her wedding day three little golden leaves."

It is Madame de Silvis who is telling the story in the dimness of a darkened room, the windows hermetically shut, the curtains let down to the ground. The little King is stretched on his little bed, the Queen near him, applying ice to his bandaged brow, ice which she renws every ten minutes, night and day, and has done so for a long week. How has she lived, without sleeping, almost without eating; sitting by that narrow bed, her hands holding those of her son in the

intervals of bandaging ; hands that pass from the chill of ice to the feverishness which she watches for which she dreads in that weak, invalid's pulse ?

The little King wants his mother there, always there. The darkness of the big room is peopled for him with sinister shadows, with terrifying apparitions. Then, the impossibility for him to read, to play with a single toy, keeps him in a torpor which disquiets Frederique.

"Are you suffering ?" she asks every moment.

"No. I'm bored," replies the child, in a weak voice ; and it is to banish this dullness, to people the gloomy shades of the room with bright visions, that Madame de Silvis has again opened the fantastic fairy-tale book, full of old German castles, of elves dancing at the foot of the keep, where the princess is waiting for the blue bird and spins with her glass distaff.

The Queen despairs as she listens to those endless stories ; it seems to her that the work she has achieved with such difficulty is being undone, that she is assisting at the crumbling, stone by stone, of an erect triumphal column. It is that she sees before her, during the long hours of seclusion ; more anxious at feeling that her child has been taken up again in a woman's hands, has returned to the weaknesses of little Zara, than at the wound itself, whose full seriousness she does not know. When the doctor, lamp in hand tears away for a moment the accumulated veils of the shade, removes the bandages, tries with a drop of atropine to awaken the sensibility of the injured eye, the mother is reassured by noticing that the little patient does not utter a cry, does not put his arms forward to defend himself. Nobody dares tell her that this insensibility, this silence of all the nerves, means the death of the organ. The bullet in rebounding, although it had lost some of its force, struck and loosened the retina. The right eye is irrevocably done for. All the precautions taken are merely directed to the preservation of the other one, threatened by that organic correlation which makes sight a single instrument with double branches. Ah ! if the Queen knew the extent of her misfortune, she who firmly believes that, thanks to her care, to her vigilant tenderness, the accident will leave no traces, and who is already speaking to the boy about their first drive !

"Leopold, will you like to have a nice drive in the forest ?"

Yes, Leopold will be very happy. Then suddenly he inquires :

"Where is Monsieur Elysee ; why does he never come ?"

They answer that his master is away on a long voyage. The explanation is sufficient. Thinking tires him, speaking also ; and he falls back into a dreary indifference, returns to the misty country which sick people evoke, blending their dreams with the places surrounding them, with the fixed appearances of everyday life, whose movement and noise are dreaded for them. People come, people go ; whispers, discreet steps meet and answer each other. But the Queen hears nothing, is occupied with nothing but bandagings. Sometimes, Christian pushes at the door, which is always ajar, because of the heat in the closed up room, and, in a voice which he tries to make cheerful, careless, comes and tells his son some amusing story to make him laugh or speak ; but his voice rings false with this recent disaster, and the father frightens the child. This young memory, which the gunshot has filled with the confusion of its smoke, feels some feature of past scenes standing out, the Queen's desperate expectations, her revolt the night when she nearly dragged him with her in a fall from three storeys high. He answers in a low tone, his teeth clenched. Then Christian addresses his wife : "You ought to rest a bit, Frederique, you'll kill yourself—in the interest of the child himself."

The little prince's hand clasps his mother's imploringly, urgingly, and she reassures him in the same eloquent and dumb fashion : "No, no, don't be afraid, I shall not leave you." She coldly exchanges a few words with her husband, then abandons him to his sinister reflections.

The accident to his son is the last of a regular series of disasters for Christian. He feels alone in the world, desperate, stunned. Ah ! if his wife would take him back. He feels the need of the weak when in misfortune to lean on somebody, to lay his head on a friendly bosom, and seek relief in tears, in confessions, and then to return more light-heartedly to new riotousness, to new treacheries. But Frederique's heart is lost to him for ever ; and behold ! his child, also, turns away from his caresses. He says all this to himself, standing at the foot of the bed, in the night of the dark room, whilst the Queen, careful of the minutes, takes ice from a bowl, applies it to the wet bandage, lifts and kisses the little invalid's brow, in order to find out how warm it is, and Madame de Silvis gravely

relates the story of the three small golden loaves to the late sovereign of the kingdoms of Illyria and Dalmatia.

Without his going out being more remarked than his entrance, Christian leaves the room, wanders mournfully about the spacious and well-ordered house, kept up to its ordinary ceremonial by the old Rosen, who is seen, coming and going from the hotel to the office, his figure upright and his head shaking. The conservatory, the garden continue to flourish, the marmosets revived by the warmth, fill their cage with little cries and capers. The aspect of the *hotel* is still elegant and comfortable, but there is an air of waiting, of expectation, a suspense in the surrounding life, a silence like that following a great storm. The most striking sight is presented by the hermetically closed shutters up there, all three shut, even when everything is opened to fresh air, to light, holding within a mystery of pain and disease.

Meraut, who, dismissed from the royal household, had taken lodgings quite near, and continually prowls round the hotel, Meraut looks despairingly at those windows. It is his torture, his condemnation; he returns there every day with the hope of finding them one morning wide open, letting out of smoke the light of an extinguished taper. The inhabitants of that part of the city, Saint Mande begin to know him. They think he is a traitor, a mad; and indeed his despair borders on mania. It is his love, the lover who suffers in him. The Queen did well to drive him away. He simply deserved it, and his passion disappeared in the great disaster to his hopes. To have dreamed of making a king, to have given himself so splendid a task, and to destroy everything, break everything, with his own hands! The father and mother, more intimately injured in their love, were not more desperate than he. He had not even the consolation of bestowing anxious care upon the child even an hour, could scarcely get news, the servants feeling a bitter rancour towards him since the accident. However, one of the forest rangers, with access to the house, told him the gossip in the servants' hall, exaggerated by the common people's love of something disastrous. Sometimes the little King was blind, sometimes he had brain fever, at others the Queen had determined to starve herself to death; and the unhappy Elysee would be a whole day thinking over these horrifying rumours, would wander through the woods as long as his legs would carry him, would then return to watch among the high

flowery grass, trampled down on Sundays by people walking, but deserted on week-days, a genuine bit of country.

Towards the end of the day he had stretched himself out there, when his glance, which was not directed to anything, fell on the ill-balanced gait and Quaker's hat, the white waistcoat and hat of Boscovich. The councillor was walking quickly, with little, hasty, feminine steps, looking very agitated, and held something carefully wrapped in his pocket-handkerchief. He did not seem astonished at seeing Elysee, went to him and said in the most natural way possible :

"My dear Meraut, you are a very contended man."

"Ah ! heavens ! What is the condition of monseigneur ?"

The botanist put on his ceremonial expression as he answered that monseigneur was going on the same ; still in bed, a darkened room, a painful uncertainty. Oh ! very painful. Then abruptly :

"Guess what I've got here. Take care, it's fragile, you might knock off the soil. A clematis root, but not the vulgar clematis of your gardens—*Clematis Dalmatica*—a quite special dwarf species, which you only find over there in my country. I was doubtful at first, I hesitated. I have been watching it since the spring. But look at the stalks, the corollas ; that smell of almonds."

And, opening his handkerchief with infinite precautions, he brought forth a frail, crooked plant, with a milky white flower paling away to the green of leaves, almost blending with them. Meraut tried to question him, to extract other news from him, but the monomaniac remained completely absorbed in his discovery.

He stood there, in the declining light, his clematis in his hand, motionless, in happy contemplation. Then suddenly :

"The dinner ! It's getting late. I must go back. Good-bye."

"I'm coming with you," said Elysee.

Boscovich was thunderstruck. He had been present at the scene, knew in what way the tutor had left, though he only attributed his dismissal to an accident. What would they think ? What would the Queen say ?

"Nobody will see me, councillor. Let me in by the avenue, and I shall secretly slip into the room."

"What ! you intend——"

"To go near monseigneur, to him speak a moment, without his suspecting I'm there."

The weak Boscovich exclaimed, protested, but nevertheless he walked in front, urged on by the desire of Elysee, who followed him without troubling about his protests.

Oh! what feelings, when the small door on the avenue opened in the ivy, and Meraut found himself at that spot in garden where his life was shattered.

"Wait," said the councillor in a tremble, "I'll let you know when the servants are at table, so that you won't meet anybody on the staircase."

No one had gone to the shooting range since the fatal day. In the crushed borders, in the gravel trampled by wildly running feet, the scene could still be traced. The same pierced targets hung on the trellis, the water flowed from the basin like a fountain of tears, grey in the melancholy hour of twilight, and it seemed to Elysee that he heard also the sobbing voice of the Queen, and that "Go away!" which, as he heard it in memory, gave him the feeling of a wound and of a caress. On Boscovich's return they glided along the bushes to the house. In the glass gallery, opening on the garden, which they used as a schoolroom, the books still lay on the table, the two chairs for the master and pupil stood ready, awaiting the next lesson with the cruel inertness of things. It was poignant, even as the silence of places from which a child is gone, with his singing, running, laughter, cries.

After climbing the well-lit staircase, Boscovich, who went up in front, showed Elysee into the room adjoining the King's, which was also darkened to keep out the slightest ray of light. A nightlight alone burned in a corner, with a number of phials and potions.

"The Queen and Madame de Silvis are with him. Mind you don't speak. And come back quickly."

Elysee no longer heard him, his foot was already on the threshold, his heart beating rapidly and awestruck. His eyes unused to the darkness, could not pierce the thick shadows; he distinguished nothing, but heard coming from the farther end, a childish voice reciting, chanting the evening prayer—a voice very hard to recognise as that of the little King, so tired, dull, dreary was it. After one of the numerous "amens," the child broke in:

"Mother, must I also say the prayer of the kings?"

"Yes, my darling," rejoined a firm, grave voice whose

timbre had also changed, wavering a little at its edges, like a metal worn by an acid distilled drop by drop.

The prince hesitated as he replied :

"I thought—it seemed to me it was not worth while now."

The Queen asked sharply :

"And why ?"

"Oh !" said the child King, in the tone of a wise old man, "I thought I should have many other things to ask God for than what is in that prayer."

But recovering himself with an impulse of his kindly little nature :

"At once, mamma, at once—as you wish it."

And he began slowly in a resigned and-shaky voice :

"O Lord, my God, Thou hast placed Thy servant on the throne, but I am only a child, knowing not to guide myself, and charged with the guidance of the people Thou hast given unto me."

At the end of the room a stifled sob was heard. The Queen started.

"Who is there ? Is it you, Christian ?" she added, as she heard the door shut.

At the end of the week the doctor declared the little patient was no longer to be kept in a darkened room, and the time had come to let in a little light.

"Already !" cried Frederique. "But I was assured it would last more than a month."

The doctor dared not answer that, the eye being dead, quite dead, without a chance of recovery, such confinement become useless. He got out of the difficulty by one of those vague phrases, the secret of which spring from the pitiful feelings of doctors. The Queen did not understand, and nobody about her ventured to tell her the truth. They awaited Father Alpee, religion having privilege over all wounds, even those which it cannot heal. With his brutality, his roughness of tone, the monk, who used God's words like a cudgel, dealt the terrible blow which was sure to bend all Frederique's pride. The mother had suffered on the day of the accident, struck in the inmost fibres of her love by the cries, the fainting, the streaming blow of the poor little boy. This second grief applied more directly to the Queen. Her son mutilated, disfigured ! She, who wished him so handsome for his triumph, to bring back this invalid to the Illyrians ! She could not forgive the

doctor for having deceived her. So, even in exile, kin would always be victims of their greatness and of human cowardice.

In order to avoid too abrupt a transition from darkness to light the windows had been covered with green baize ; then the windows were freely opened, and when the actors in the sad drama could see each other once more in full daylight they could estimate the changes resulting from their confinement. Frederique had grown old, was obliged to change her coiffure, to brush down her hair about the temples to hide the white waves. The little prince, quite pale, sheltered his right eye under a bandage ; and his whole face, marked with premature wrinkles, seemed to bear the burden of that bandage. What a new life for him was that life of an invalid ! At last he had to learn again how to eat, since his spoon, his fork, clumsily handled, would touch his forehead or his ear, or sense affecting all the others. He would laugh his weak little laugh, and the Queen would every moment turn away to hide her tears. As soon as he was able to go down into the garden there were other anguishes to be gone through. He would hesitate, stumble at each step, walk sideways, fall even, or recoil timidly at the slightest obstacle, clinging to his mother's hands or skirts, turning round the familiar corners of the palace as if they were so many ambushes. The Queen tried to awaken at least his mind, but doubtless the shock had been too much ; one might have said that with the visual ray a ray of understanding had been destroyed. He well knew, poor little boy, the pain his condition caused his mother ; when speaking to her, he raised his head with an effort, casting a timid and awkward look at her, as if to ask her forgiveness for his weakness. He could not, however, overcome certain unreasonable physical frights. Thus the discharge of a gun at the edge of the wood, the first he had heard since the accident nearly caused him an epileptic fit. Also, the first time that he spoke to him about riding the pony he trembled all over.

"No, no, I beg you," he said, pressing close to Frederique. "Take me in the landau with you ; I'm too frightened."

"Frightened of what ?"

"I'm frightened—dreadfully frightened."

Neither arguments nor entreaties were any use.

"Well," ordered the Queen, with a feeling of dull anger, "let the carriage be sent round."

It was a beautiful Sunday at the end of autumn. B

Frederique felt harassed by the plebeian crowd spread over all the avenues and the grass. The boy, trying to rid the beautiful face of its wrinkles and its disenchanted expression, which he attributed to himself, encircled his mother with passionate and timid coaxings.

"You're angry with me, mamma, at my not having taken the pony?"

No, she was not angry with him. But what would he do on the coronation day, when his subjects recalled him? A king must be able to ride.

The small wrinkled face turned to gaze at the Queen with his single eye, inquiring:

"You really think they'll want me as I am now?"

He looked very delicate, very old for his age. Frederique nevertheless was indignant at the doubt, spoke of the King of Westphalia who was totally blind.

"Oh! a laughing-stock of a king. He was dismissed."

She then told him the story of John of Bohemia at the battle of Crecy requesting his knights to lead him far enough in the van that he might be able to strike with his sword, and they had led him so far that they were found all dead next day, their bodies stretched out, their horses tied together.

"It's dreadful—dreadful" cried Leopold.

And he remained shuddering, absorbed in that heroic tale, as in one of Madame de Silvis's fairy stories, so small, so feeble, so little of a king. At that moment the carriage left the borders of the lake and went down a narrow alley, where there was hardly room for the wheels. Someone drew back quickly as they passed, a man whom the boy, hindered by the bandage, could not see, but she recognised at once. Grave, with a hard expression, with a movement of the head she pointed to the poor cripple, nestling in her skirts, their crushed master-piece, that *debris*, that wreck of a great race. It was their last meeting; and Meraut definitely left Saint-Mande.

Chapter Fifteen

FIDES, SPES

THE Duke de Rosen was the first to enter. "It's rather damp," he said gravely. It has not been opened since my son's death."

Indeed there was a great chilliness, and as it were the damp of a tomb in this splendid suite of ground-floor rooms, where

the guzlas had sounded so proudly, where everything was in the same place as on the night of the ball. The two sculptured chairs of the King and Queen still presided over the room near the musicians' tribune. Arm chairs in circles formed aristocratic nooks. Ribbons, shreds of flowers, faded, light gauze, a real dust of the dance, were scattered on the floors. One felt the decorators had hurriedly taken down the hangings, the garlands of foliage, and had hastened to shut the doors and windows on these rooms which recalled a *fete* in a house of mourning. The same neglect was seen in the garden, encumbered with dead leaves, over which the winter had passed, then an untended springtide, rich in rank, invading grass. In one of those eccentricities of grief which requires everything round it to suffer, to be barren, the duke had not allowed anyone to touch the things, any more than he himself would consent to occupy his magnificent house.

Since the affair of Gravosa, when Collette in very bad health after her confinement, had gone to recuperate with her little W. at Nice, he had given up his solitary life at the Quai d'Anjou, and had had a bed put up for him at the office. Evidently, he would sell the *hotel* some day or other, and was beginning to get rid of the sumptuous antiquities which filled it. The Venetian mirrors which had reflected loving pairs dancing Hungarian mazurkas, the flashes of eyes and lustres, reflected to-day, in the chill, grey light of a Parisian sky, the queer profiles, the greedy eyes, the burning lips of father Leemans and the sieur Pichery, his acolyte, livid, with side curls, his moustache stiff with cosmetics.

Truly, it needed the force of habit on the dealer's part, his constant practice in trade, and in those comedies which bring into play all the grimaces of the human mask, to restrain a cry of joy, of admiration, when the general's servant, as old, as erect as his master, opened the tall shutters, and there could be seen, discreetly mirrored, shaded in their superb tones of wood, bronze and ivory, all the precious treasures of a collection that was not labelled and cared for like that of Madame de Spalato, but in more abundant, more barbaric and more modern luxuriousness. And without a fudge or fraud among them! Old Rosen had not plundered at random, like those generals who pass through a summer palace like a hurricane, carrying off with the same impetuosity, turreted roofs and straw rubbish. Nothing but select marvels of art. And it was curious to observe the dealer's derisions,

his muzzle jutting out under his thick hair, gently scratching the enamels, ringing the bronzes, with an indifferent, even contemptuous air, whilst from head to foot from the tips of his fingers to the point of his flat beard, all his body was vibrating, quivering, as if it had been put in communication with an electric battery. Pichery was no less amusing to watch. Having no idea of art, no personal taste, he modelled his impressions on his comrade's, displayed the same scornful air, quickly turned to amazement when Leemans whispered to him, as he bent over the pocket-books in which he was continually making notes: "Worth a hundred thousand francs, if it's worth a halfpenny." There was a unique opportunity for both to recoup themselves for the "grand roke," in which they had been so dreadfully dished. But they had to be well on guard, because the old General of Mamelouks, as suspicious and impenetrable as the whole curio collection put together, followed them step by step, planted himself behind them, not being duped a moment by their expressions and manners.

So they reached the end of the *salons*, a little room raised a few steps, delightful decorated in the Moorish style, with very comfortable sofas, genuine old carpets, cabinets.

"Is this in the lot?" inquired Leemans.

The general hesitated imperceptibly before answering. It was Colette's nest in the huge *hotel*, her favourite boudoir, where she resorted in her rare leisure, wrote her letters. The dealer came to him to save these few Eastern pieces of furniture he liked; but he did not stop to do so: he wanted to get out.

"That's included," he said coldly.

Leemans, at once attracted by the rarity of a piece of Arabian furniture, carved gilded, with miniature arches and arabesques, began to inspect its many secret drawers opening one out of another by means of concealed springs, cunningly contrived, fresh-smelling drawers exhaling orange and sandal-wood. Plunging his hand into one of them he felt a spring.

"There are papers," he said.

The inventory over, the two dealers shown to the door, the dealer thought about those papers forgotten in the small room of furniture—a whole bundle of letters, tied with a ribbon, impregnated with the perfumes of the drawer. He glanced at them mechanically, recognised the writing. The

large, fantastic, irregular writing of Christian, which for several months he had got to know on bills and drafts. Doubtless letters from the King to Herbert. But no, "*Colette, my dear heart.*" With an abrupt gesture, he tore off the band, scattered the packet on a sofa, some thirty notes, assignations, thanks, all the correspondence of adultery in its wretched banality, ending in excuses for appointments missed, in missives growing colder and colder, like the last fluttering papers at the tail of a kite. In almost all there were allusions to a tedious and persecuting personage whom Christian nicknamed "Courtier of Misfortune," or simply, "C. of Misfortune," and to whom the duke tried to assign a name, when, on the turn of those jeering pages, all more libertine than sentimental, he saw his own caricature ; his small, pointed head, on long, stilt-like legs. It was himself, his wrinkles, his aquiline beak, his blinking look ; and beneath, to leave no doubt : *Courtier of Misfortune on guard at the Quai d'Orsay.*

The first surprise over, the outrage understood in all its baseness, the old man cried : "Oh !" and remained stunned, filled with shame.

That his son had been deceived did not astonish him. But that it should have been by this Christian, to whom they had sacrificed everything, for whom Herbert died at twenty-eight, for whom he was by way of ruining himself, of selling even his trophies of victory that the royal signature might not be dishonoured ! Ah ! if he could avenge himself, take down from those panoplies one of his two weapons, no matter which. But he was the King ! A king can do no wrong. And suddenly, the magic of the sacred word calming his anger, he reflected that, after all, monseigneur, in trifling with one of his servants, was not so culpable as he, the Duke de Rosen, who had married his son to a Sauvadon. He was bearing the penalty of his greed. All those reflections lasted but a minute. Putting the letters under lock and key, he went out, returned to his post at Saint-Mande, where a crowd of notes, of papers were awaiting him, among which he recognised more than once the big, irregular writing of the love-letters ; and Christian could not have believed him informed of the least thing when, passing through the court on the following day, he noticed behind the window-panes the long outline of the Courtier of Misfortune, always erect, devoted, and vigilant.

Now that his child was out of danger, Christian went the

pace at his maddest. He had at first tried to get back to Sephora. Yes, after having been brutally and cynically driven away, after having had every proof of her treachery, he still loved her enough to run to her feet at the least sign. The fair one was at this moment absorbed in the joy of a renewed honeymoon. Cured of her ambitions, she wanted to sell her *hotel*, to realise everything and live at Courbevoie with J. Tom, as rich retired tradespeople. He, on the other hand, dreamed of new *coups*, and the grandiose surroundings of his wife gradually gave him the idea of another agency, in a more luxurious, more society form—trade, gloved up to the elbows, doing business among flowers and the band of a *fete* around the lake, along the racecourse, and replacing the hansom, which is now out of date, by a solid carriage, with liveried servants and the monogram of the countess. He had no difficulty in convincing Sephora, in whose house he now definitely lived; and the *salons* of the Avenue de Messine were lighted up for a series of dinners and balls, the invitations for which were sent out in the names of the Count and Countess de Spalato.

They could not refuse Christian admission to those rooms which had cost him so dear. At first the title of King gave brilliance, a standing to the house, so he went there in a cowardly way, with a vague hope of once more reaching the countess's heart. After having for some time played this role of dupe or victim, showing himself very weak, as white of linen as of face, he grew discouraged, came no more, ran after women in order to forget about things. Like all men in search of a type once lost he wandered everywhere, descended low, very low, guided by Lebeau, who was accustomed to Parisian vice, and who often in the morning brought his master's valise to strange dens. A regular *debacle*, easier day by day to that effeminate voluptuary's soul, whose sad, quiet home life was not likely to turn him from it. For some time the Franciscans had been looking for another tutor; but an Elysee Meraut is not easily found among modern youth. Father Alphee had ideas about it, which he took care to keep to himself, since the Queen would not allow the name of the ex-tutor to be mentioned in her presence. Once, however, in a special circumstance, the monk ventured to mention his friend.

"Madame, Elysee Meraut is dying," he said, as they left the table after grace.

During the whole time of his stay at Saint-Mande, by a sort of superstition, just as one keeps at the top of a wardrobe

an old-fashioned garment of one's youth that will never be worn again, Meraut had kept his room in the Rue Monsieur-Le-Prince. One day he arrived, aged, wearied out, his hair almost white. The fat landlady, roused from her torpor by hearing someone searching among the keys hanging on their nails, had difficulty in recognising her lodger.

"What devilment have you been up to, my poor Monsieur Meraut? How could you ruin your constitution like that?"

"It's true, I'm rather done up," said Elysee, smiling, and he went up to his fifth floor with his back rounded, crushed.

The room was still the same, with the melancholy horizon to be seen from its dull windows. Nothing was changed, but he had no longer those fine ardours of youth, which colour warm everything about them, are even enhanced by difficulties and distresses. He tried to read, shook the dust from unfinished work. Between his thoughts and the page came the Queen's look of reproach, and it seemed to him that his pupil, sitting at the other end of the table, was waiting for his lesson and listening. He felt too broken-hearted, too, lonely, went hurriedly down, and put his key back on its nail; and thenceforth was seen as formerly, with his big, loose figure, his hat on the back of his head, a bundle of books and reviews under his arm, wandering about the Quartier Latin, under the galleries of the Odeon, on the Quai Voltaire, bending over the odour of new books, and the clumsy cases of second-hand literature, reading in the street, in the alleys of the Luxembourg or gesticulating as he leant against some statue in the garden, in terribly cold weather, opposite the frozen fountain. In this environment of study and intelligent youth, he regained his energies and spirit. Nearly all the money he had saved in his situation still remained. He did not even look out for lessons, wrapped himself up in a scornful sorrow, too great, too deep, to be understood, without any distractions, but some visits to the Convent of the Franciscans, not only to get news of Saint-Mande, but because he loved the bizarre chapel, the cavern of Jerusalem, with the bleeding and highly-coloured Jesus.

One night, Elysee was awakened with a start by a strange feeling of heat, mounting up from his chest; slowly and without pain, without shock, with an impression of final annihilation, his mouth filled with a red, insipid taste. It was

mysterious and sinister, the illness coming like an assassin who opens the doors noiselessly in the dark. He was not frightened, consulted some medical students of his *table d'hôte*. They told him he was seriously ill. "What's the matter with me?" "Everything." He had reached forty, the climacteric of Bohemia, when infirmity lies in ambush, watches the man, makes him pay dearly for the excesses or privations of his youth; a terrible age, especially when the moral spring is broken, when the will to live no longer exists. Elysee spent the same life, always out in rain, in wind; passing from overheated halls, burning with gas, to the cold of the streets in mid-winter, continuing when all lights were out to discuss on edge of the pavement, walking half the night through. The blood spitting became more frequent; dreadful lassitude followed. In order not to take to his bed, for the deserted gloom of his room weighed on him, he established himself at the Rialto, a tavern near the hotel, read his papers, dreamt in a corner. The spot was quiet till night, bright with its furniture of polished oak, its walls covered with frescoes representing Venice, with bridges, with cupolas in perspective over a liquid rainbow. But soon his strength failed him, even for these hours in the tavern. He could no longer go down, was obliged to remain in bed, surrounded by books and papers, leaving his door ajar, so that the life, the noise of the lodging-house might come to him. Above all, he was forbidden to speak. Then the southerner resigned himself to writing, and resumed his book, his famous book, about Monarchy, continued it feverishly and with a trembling hand, shaken by a cough which scattered the pages on the bed. Now he only feared one thing—to die before finishing it, to pass away as he had lived, hidden, unknown, unexpressed.

Sauvador, whose coarse vanity suffered at seeing his master in that garret, often came to visit him. Immediately after the accident he had hurried to him with open purse on the look-out again for "ideas about things." My dear uncle, I haven't any more," was Meraut's disheartened answer and to draw him out of his apathy the worthy uncle Sauvador spoke of sending him to the south, to Nice, to share the sumptuous establishment of Colette and her little W.

"It wouldn't cost me any more," he said naively, "and it would cure you."

Elysee, however, was not anxious for a cure, wanting to finish his book at the very place where it had germinated,

among those deep Parisian noises in which each one hears the dominant note that suits him. While he wrote, Sauvadon, sitting at the foot of the bed, maundered about his pretty niece, exasperated himself against the old lunatic of a general, who was about to sell his *hotel* in the Ile Saint Louis.

"I ask you, what can he do with all that money? He must hide it away in holes, in small heaps; after all, it's his business, Colette is rich enough to do without him."

And the wine merchant slapped his little stomach, stretched like a drum.

Another time, throwing on the bed the bundle of papers he used to bring Elysee:

"It seems that they are stirring again in Illyria: and they have just returned to the Diet a royalist majority. Ah, if there were a man there, but that little Leopold is still very young, and Christian is sinking lower from day to day—he now visits the lowest bawdy houses with his valet.

Elysee listened to him, shivering all over. Poor Queen! The other continued without observing the hurt he caused:

"They are certainly going it, are our exiles. There is the Prince d'Axel compromised in that dirty business of the Avenue d'Antin; you know, that family hotel, which with its patriarchal label served as a refuge for girls under age of emancipated views. What a scandal! a hereditary prince! Still, one thing astonishes me. At the very time of the family hotel affair, Colette wrote to me, Monseigneur was at Nice, and that she had been at the regatta in a yacht hired for her by his Highness—certainly there must be some mistake. I should be very glad of it; for between ourselves, my dear Meraut—"

The worthy man here confided to his friend that the prince was showing himself very attentive to Colette; and as she was not a woman to—you may imagine—might happen in a short time.

The broad workman face of the *parvenu* was lit up with a smile.

"Fancy that! Colette, Queen of Finland, and Sauvadon of Bercy, her uncle, becoming uncle of the King! But I am wearying you."

"Yes, I want to sleep," said Elysee, who for some minutes had shut his eyes, a polite way of getting rid of that kindly, vain chatterer. The old man gone, he gathered his papers together, settled himself to write, but without being able to do *all*ine, overcome with an extreme disgust, with an extreme

weariness. All those hideous tales had discouraged him in the faith of the pages scattered over his bed, that pleading for royalty in which he was consuming the little blood he had left. Seeing himself in that sordid room, with the grey hairs of an old student, so much passion lost, so much force wasted, he doubted for the first time, asked himself if he had not been a dupe all his life—a defender—an apostle—of those kings who degraded themselves in voluptuousness, deserted their own cause. And whilst his eyes wandered drearily over those bare walls, to which the setting sun only arrived by reflections from the windows opposite, he noticed in its dusty frame a red seal "*Fides' Spes*," which he had taken from his father's beside. Suddenly the fine Bourbon face of old Meraut appeared to him just as he had seen it, rigid on its death-bed, asleep in his sublime trust and loyalty, and the narrow lanes, the horizon of crumbling windmills, between the dry rock of the hillside and the implacable blue of the South. It was a minute of hallucinations, his whole youth floating through a memory which was already becoming misty.

All at once, the door opens with a rustling of dress and of voices. He thinks it is a neighbor, some kindly girl from Rialto bringing him drink for his fever. He quickly shuts his eyes; that sleep which dismisses importunate visitors. But little irresolute footsteps are approaching on the cold floor of the room. A gentle voice murmurs: "Good Monsieur Elysee." His pupil is before him, nervous, grown a little, gazing with an invalid's timidity at his master, so changed, so pale in his wretched bed. Yonder, near the door, a woman is waiting, erect and proud under her veil. She has come, she has climbed the five stories, the staircase, full of the sounds of debauchery, brushed with her immaculate dress the doors inscribed, "Alice," "Clemence." She did not want him to die without seeing first his little Zara again, and, without entering herself, sends him her forgiveness by the child's little hand. That hand Elysee Meraut takes, presses it to his lips; then turning towards the august presence, whom he divines upon the threshold, with his last breath, his last effort of life, of speech, he says in a low voice and for the last time; "Long live the King!"

Chapter Sixteen

THE END OF A RACE

THERE was a strenuous match that morning at the tennis club. Round the immense court on the ground, which was beaten, trodden, like an arena, a big net enveloped with its close meshes the evolutions of six players in white jackets, fencing shoes; leaping, shouting, shaking their heavy racquets. What with the hippodromelike light falling from high windows, the stretched net, the hoarse cries, the springing movements of the white costumes, the impassive correctness of the attendants, all English, pacing the surrounding gallery with deliberate steps, one would have believed oneself to be in some circus, during the rehearsal of the gymnasts and the clowns. Among these clowns, Monseigneur the Prince d'Axel, who had been ordered the noble exercise of tennis for the relief of his torpid state, might be reckoned one of the noisiest. Having arrived the day before from Nice, where he had just spent a month at the feet of Colette, this match was his re-entry into Parisian life, when, at the critical point of the game, he was informed that someone was waiting to see him.

"Don't bother me", replied the Crown Prince, without even turning his head.

The servant instead, spoke a name into his Highness's ear, who calmed down, rather astonished.

"All right, ask him tho wait; I'll come as soon as the game is over."

Entering one of the cold-bath rooms which go round the galley, furnished in bamboo, neatly hung with Japanese matting, he found his friend Rigolo, cowering on a sofa, with bent head.

"Oh, my dear prince, what an adventure," cried the ex-King of Illyria, raising an agitated face.

He stopped at the sight of the servant laden with towels, woollen and horsehair gloves for sponging, currying monseigneur, who was sweating, steaming like a Mecklenburg horse which has just climbed a hill. The operation over, Christian went on with pale, quivering lips:

"This is what has happened to me. You heard of the affair of the family hotel?"

His Highness turned his dull look towards him, "Caught?"

The King nodded, turning his fine, irresolute eyes aside. Then, after a silence:

"You may imagine the scene : the police in the middle of the night ; the girl crying, rolling on the ground, scratching at the police, clinging to my knees : 'Monseigneur, monseigneur, save me.' I tried to get her to keep quiet—too late—when I tried to give a name the commissary begins laughing : 'It's no good, my men have recognised you. You are the Prince d'Axel.'"

"That's all right," growled the prince from his basin ; "and then ?"

"My goodness, my dear friend, I was so taken by surprise—other motives also, which I'll tell you—in fact, I let the man believe I was you, convinced that the thing wouldn't go any further—but no. It's being talked about again, and as you might be called before the magistrate, I come to beg you——"

"To stand in the dock in your place ?"

"No ; it won't come to that ; but the newspapers will talk about it, names will be mentioned ; and at this moment, with what's going on in Illyria, the Royalist movement, our coming restoration, this scandal would have the saddest effect."

What a pitiable air he had, the unfortunate Rigolo ! awaiting the decision of his cousin d'Axel, who silently combed his three yellow hairs before the mirror. At last the royal prince made up his mind to say :

"So you think the papers——?"

And suddenly, in his weak, sleepy, ventriloquist voice :

"First rate, first rate, that will make my uncle angry."

He had dressed, took his stick, stuck his hat on one side :

"Let's go and lunch."

Arm-in-arm, they went by the Terrasse des Feuillants and got into Christian's phaeton, which was waiting at the gate of the Tuileries, warped themselves in their furs, for it was a fine winter morning, bright with a pink, cold sun, and the elegant equipage went of like the wind, carrying our inseparables towards the Cafe de Loudres : Rigolo relieved, all beaming, Queue-de-Poule, less somnolent than usual, exhilarated by his tennis match and the thought of that escapade of which all Paris would believe him the hero. As they crossed the Place Vendome, almost deserted at that hour, a woman of elegant and young appearance stopped at the edge of the pavement, holding a child by the hand, and looking at the numbers. His Highness, who from the height of his seat, stared at all the pretty women with the greediness of a Boule-

wardsman who has been starving for the last three weeks, noticed her, started.

"Look, Christian—it's like——"

But Christian did not hear, being occupied with looking after his mare, which was very frisky that morning ; and when they turned round in the narrow carriage to gaze at the fair passer-by, she and her child had just entered under the archway of one of the houses near the Ministry of Justice.

She walked quickly, her veil down, rather embarrassed and hesitating, as if going to a first rendezvous ; but if the dark and exceeding rich toilet, the mysterious manner, could lead one for an instant to suspect this woman, the name she asked for from the porter, the tone of deep sadness in which the name was uttered, one of the most renowned in science, possible dissipated any idea of gallantry.

"Doctor Bouchereau ? First floor, door facing stairs ; if you have no appointment, it's useless to go up."

She did not answer, dashed up the stairs, dragging the child after her, as if she was afraid of being recalled. On the first floor they told her the same thing :

"If madame did not send in her name yesterday——"

"I'll wait," she said.

The servant did not insist, and showed them across a first anteroom, where people were sitting on boxes, in which wood was kept ; a second room also filled ; then he solemnly opened the door of a large reception room, which he shut as soon as the mother and child had entered, with the air of saying : "You want to wait—then wait."

It was a huge room, very high, like all the first floors in the Place Vendome, sumptuously decorated with Paintings on the ceiling, wainscoting and panels. The furniture in crimson velvet, was provincial in form ; the curtains and hangings were crimson too. A chandelier in Louis XVI. style hanging over a small Empire table, a clock between two candlesticks, the absence of any objects of art, revealed the modest, hard-working doctor, who had suddenly become fashionable, and had not troubled either to attain a vogue, or to retain it. And what a vogue it was !—such as Paris alone can bestow, extending to all classes, from top to bottom of society, overflowing into the provinces, foreign countries, the whole of Europe ; and this had already gone on for ten years, without diminishing, with the unanimous approval of his colleagues, who admitted that this time success had gone to a true savant, not to

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disguised charlatanism. Bouchereau owed this fame, this extraordinary number of patients, not so much to his marvellous ability as an operator, his admirable lectures on anatomy, his knowledge of the human body, as to the light, the insight guiding him more clearly, more surely than the steel of his instruments—that penetrating eye of great thinkers and poets, that works magic with science, sees to the bottom and beyond.

That day, although it was hardly more than noon, the reception-room was already full of sombre, anxious faces, seated round about or grouped near the table, bending over books, illustrated papers, hardly turning to look at those who entered, each absorbed in himself, secluded in his ailment, preoccupied by anxiety about what the oracle would say. The hours passed by, slow and sad, in the reception-room which is growing dark, the faces appear paler, more nervous, turned supplicatingly towards the impassive Bouchereau, whenever he makes his appearance! Oh, how long the mother and child find this last waiting! made more intolerable by the approach of night, by the fear which chills them. At last it is their turn; they enter a very large study, very long, lit by a broad, high window, which opens on to the square, and still lets in some light, in spite of the late hour. Bouchereau's table is there, very simple: the bureau of a country doctor or registrar. He sits down, with his back to the light, which falls on the new-comers—the woman, whose lifted veil reveals an energetic and youthful face, with a brilliant complexion, with eyes wearied by painful vigils; the child, bending his head as if the light in front hurt him.

"What's the matter with him?" inquires Bouchereau, drawing him to him with a tone of kindness, a fatherly gesture; for under the hardness of his countenance is hidden an exquisite sensibility, which forty years of a doctor's life have not yet spoilt. The mother, before answering, signs to the child to leave them, then, in a fine, grave voice, with a foreign accent, relates how her son lost his eye the previous year by an accident. Now troubles are coming in the left eye—mistiness, dazzlings of sight, a perceptible change. To avoid complete blindness, the extraction of the dead eye is recommended. Is it feasible? Is the child able to stand it? Bouchereau listens attentively, leaning on the edge of his armchair, his two small eyes fixed on the disdainful mouth, on the pure-blooded red lips which had never been touched by salve. Then, when the mother is finished:

"The extraction that had been advised is performed every-day, and without any danger, unless there are quite exceptional circumstances. Once—once only in twenty years—I had a case at the Lariboisiere Hospital, a poor fellow who could not get over it ; it's true he was an old man, a wretched gatherer of rags, alcoholised, badly fed—here the case is not the same. Your son does not look strong, but he comes of a fine and healthy mother, who has put in his veins—well, we'll see"

He calls the child, places him between his knees, and, to distract him, to occupy his attention during the examination, asks him, with a kindly smile :

"What's your name ?"

"Leopold, Sir."

"Leopold who ?"

The boy looks at his mother without answering.

"Well, Leopold, you must take off your jacket, your waist-coat. I must inspect you ; I must sound you all over."

The child undresses slowly, clumsily, helped by his mother, whose hands tremble, and by the good old Bouchereau, who is more handy than either. Oh, the poor little frail, rickety body, with shoulders turning in towards the narrow chest, like the wings of a bird folded before its flight, and the flesh so livid that the scapulary, the medals, hang down in the darkening light, like the plaster of an *ex-voto* tablet. The mother bends her head, almost ashamed of her work, whilst the doctor listens, sounds, stopping to put a few questions.

"The father is an old man, I suppose ?"

"No, monsieur, hardly thirty-five."

"Often ill ?"

"No ; hardly ever."

"All right ; put on your clothes again, my little man."

He sinks back into his big chair, thinking, whilst the boy, after putting on his blue velvet and his furs, sits down again at the end of the room without being told. Since the last year, he is so accustomed to those mysteries, those whisperings in regard to his illness, that he does not even bother about them any longer, does not try to understand, abandons himself. But the mother, what anguish, what a look at the doctor !

"Well ?"

"Madame," observes Bouchereau in a low voice, emphasizing every word, "your child is certainly threatened with loss of sight. And yet—if it were my son I shouldn't operate—

without yet clearly understading his constitution. I observe some strange disorders in it, in which his whole body is involved, especially the blood, which is the most vitiated, the most exhausted, the most impoverished——”

“A king’s blood,” mutters Frederique, rising abruptly with an outburst of revolt. She has just recalled, has just seen suddenly, the pale face of her firstborn lying in his little coffin covered with roses. Bouchereau, also standing up, enlightened at once by these words, recognise the Queen of Illyria, whom he has never seen, because she goes nowhere, but whose portraits are everywhere.

“Oh, madame, if I had known——”

“Don’t apologise,” says Frederique, already calm; “I came here to hear the truth, that truth we never get, even in exile. Ah, Monsieur Bouchereau, how unhappy queens are! Fancy them all persecuting me to have my child operated on! Yet they well know that his life is at stake, but State reasons—in a month, a fortnight, perhaps earlier, the Diets of Illyria will be sending a deputation to us. They want to have a king to show them. As he is now, he might pass; but blind! nobody would want him. So, at the risk of killing him, the operation! Reign or die—and I was about to make myself the accomplice of such a crime. Poor little Zara! what matter whether he reigns? My God! let him live! let him live!”

Five o’clock, the night is falling in the Rue de Rivoli, crowded with carriages returning from the Bois—at the dinner-hour the carriages follow slowly along the railings of the Tuileries, which, struck by the quickly setting sun, seem to stretch themselves over the passers-by in long bars. All the side of the Arc de Triomphe is still flooded with a red northern light, while the other side is of a mourning violet, thickened with shadow towards the edges. The heavy carriage, with the arms of Illyria, rolls by there. At the turn of the Rue de Castiglione, the queen suddenly notices the balcony of the Hotel des Pyramides, and recalls the illusions of her arrival in Paris, singing and hovering like the music of the brass band which resounded that day in the masses of foliage. What deceptions since then! What struggles! Now it is ended—ended.

The race is extinct; a cold of death falls on her shoulders, whilst the landau moves towards the shadow, ever towards the shadow. So she did not see the loving, timid, imploring

look which the boy turns towards her. "Mamma, if I'm no longer king, will you love me all the same?"

"Oh, my darling!" She presses passionately the little hand outstretched towards hers.

Come, the sacrifice is accomplished. Warmed, comforted that clasp, Frederique is no longer anything but a mother; and when the Tuileries, with their solid ashes gilded by a ray of the setting sun, rises all at once before her to remind her of the past, she beholds it without feeling, without a memory, imagining she saw some ancient ruin of Assyria or Egypt, a witness of vanished peoples and their lives, a grand old thing—dead.

THE END

